DIANA OF DOBSON'S

CECILY HAMILTON

Frank Wise

DIANA OF DOBSON'S

"I Wonder if Success is Worth Buying at That Price!"

DIANA OF DOBSON'S

BY

CECILY HAMILTON

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1908

Copyright, 1908, by
THE CENTURY CO.

Published, June, 1908

J. F. Tapley Co
Book Manufacturers
551-555 West 57th St
New York

BOOK I

"DOBSON'S"

DIANA OF DOBSON'S

CHAPTER I

DIANA MASSINGBERD sat with her elbows on the table staring at the yellow-brown paper that disfigured the wall of the assistants' dining-room. Here and there the yellow-brown paper was stained with smears and dirt, and upon one of these smears Diana's eyes had fixed themselves. She usually sat opposite that particular smudge at meals and she knew the shape of it nearly by heart —triangular but rounded off a little at the top. Just over it hung a text—"He shall feed His Flock like a Shepherd"—in thick black letters on a ground that had once been white; and a little to the left

was a large square of cardboard displaying the one hundred and twenty-seven rules which Mr. Septimus Dobson had laid down for the guidance of his assistants.

"I wonder," Diana said suddenly, breaking the silence that had hitherto been ruffled only by the hissing of the gas-jets and the scratching of a steel pen upon a shiny sheet of paper; "I wonder what Dobson would do if I were to break all the rules in one day—every one of them, straight off the reel, from the beginning of the list to the end?"

Half a dozen heads were lifted to look at the speaker. Kitty Brant's pen ceased to scribble, Miss Whitehead, a stoutish, anæmic-looking girl, raised a pair of meekly astonished blue eyes from the perusal of the latest number of the Mayfair Novelettes, Miss Jay giggled and Miss Smithers' needle hung poised for a

moment in mid-air. Then, with a sharp click of the thimble, she drove it home.

"He 'd give you the sack," she said with curt decision.

"Of course," Diana retorted, "but I should have floored him all the same. He could n't make me pay for all the rules I 'd broken—for obvious reasons. I totalled up the amount payable in fines the other day and I discovered that the exact sum which it would cost to break every rule on that card is one pound fifteen shillings and ninepence. Now I have n't got one pound fifteen shillings and ninepence in the world—so I should have to leave Dobson's drapery establishment owing the proprietor that amount. The probability is that I should go on owing it. I wonder if he 'd send me in a bill and county-court me if I did n't pay?"

This time a vapid giggle from the fluffy-haired Miss Jay was the only response.

Miss Smithers did not deign one; she merely pressed her lips together, shrugged her shoulders and dug her needle into the skirt she was braiding. Miss Massingberd's moods irritated her; though she could not have expressed her feelings in words, she realized, half unconsciously, that Diana's outspoken rebellion against the routine of her daily life was making its slow monotony less easy for herself to bear. She had never felt Diana's fierce and passionate resentment against the system that aimed at transforming living flesh and blood into the mechanism of a profit-mongering drapery machine; but her own vague and impotent discontent had been a bitter thing in its time and was bitter still when she allowed herself to dwell on the possibilities of wider lives; and Diana's anger, Diana's pain, Diana's longings, stirred her uncomfortably, and

threw upon her mind a pale reflection of their own turbulence.

Diana guessed Miss Smithers' attitude towards herself and the system that molded their common lives—and despised it. There was rebel blood in her—Irish blood—and to her the submission that Miss Smithers cultivated not only as a shield but as a virtue was the sin of sins. She came of the class that breeds revolutionists—the class that knowing itself gentle by birth and education, finds itself lacking in the means to maintain the one and gratify the other and realizes, as perhaps no other class can do, the sheer brute power of money.

Her lips straightened themselves a little disdainfully as she surveyed Miss Smithers' stubbornly bent head; her nerves were on edge to-night and she was in the mood for a wrangle with anybody. But Miss

Smithers was just as well aware of that fact as Diana herself—further, like the rest of her fellow-toilers, she had a wholesome respect for Miss Massingberd's sharp-edged tongue. So it was Diana herself who took up the tale again.

"I 've only treated myself to six-pennyworth of fines to-day," she said, folding her arms behind her head and staring defiantly at the card beside the text. "Threepence for being late at the counter and threepence for unbusiness-like conduct. It was the Pringle woman each time. According to her every single thing I do comes under the heading of unbusiness-like conduct. I should like to smother her and dance on her corpse."

A giggle from Miss Jay, a significant glance at the door from Miss Smithers, and then Kitty Brant's plaintive little voice chimed in:

"Di, I wish you did n't hate her so."

"Why—don't you hate her and her nagging and spying? don't we all? Even Miss Smithers loathes the Pringle though she does cringe to her and lick her boots—"

This time the challenge was too direct to be ignored and Miss Smithers raised a reddened face.

"You 've no business to say that of me, Miss Massingberd. I would n't lick anybody's boots, Miss Pringle's least of all; but I 'm not such a fool as to risk my bread and butter in the way you do. Why this morning you all but contradicted Mr. Dobson himself, about those suède gauntlets."

"Miss Smithers, I wish I had had the pluck to contradict Mr. Dobson right down—flat—direct, about those suède gauntlets. I was right and he was wrong —and the old beast knew it. He just wanted the pleasure of bullying me before

you all; he 's got his knife into me just as much as Miss Pringle has. Wonder how long it will be before I get the sack, Kit?"

"Oh, Di, you must n't." Kitty Brant's voice was almost tearful, her eyes round and anxious. Alone of her fellows she liked Diana Massingberd, pitied and understood why it was that her fetters cut so deeply into her soul. The elder girl's flat rebellion against the dull system which ground out lives in return for a pitiful wage would have been impossible to Kitty; but she secretly admired what she dared not imitate. And the one dark spot in her future—her pen had been scraping out a foolish little outburst of affection to the man who in three months time was to give her a home—was the regret that while she herself was about to escape from the toils of Dobson's, Di would be left entangled in them still.

"Oh, Di, you must n't."

Diana thrust back her rumpled hair with a curt laugh.

"What 's the good of saying that to me, Kit? You must talk to Dobson. I can't help getting the sack if he gives it to me, can I? I'd bet a shilling, if I had a shilling, that I get kicked out within a fortnight. For one thing, I was caught sitting down to-day."

"Who caught you?"

"Need you ask? Miss Emily Pringle, of course—which means you may bet your life, that I 've been reported to Dobson. It was just my luck. There was n't a soul at our counter, and nobody about, and I was feeling dead beat, so I thought I 'd chance it and sit down for a moment on one of the seats which the Government insists shall be provided—for us to look at. I 'd hardly pulled it out when the Pringle came sweeping back from her dinner, five minutes before I expected her. She made

straight for me, of course—trust her for that—smiling her most acid smile and enquired tenderly if I was feeling tired? I told her I was dog-tired—and that my feet ached; one may just as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb and I knew I was dead sure to be reported for sitting down in business hours—government regulations notwithstanding."

Miss Smithers, still justly smarting under the remarks anent Miss Pringle and the licking of boots, lifted her eyebrows and twisted her lips into a pucker of contempt which might have been intended either for the framers of the Shop Assistants' Seating Act or for Miss Massingberd's folly in taking advantage of the Act's provisions. To be caught sitting down in business hours in Mr. Septimus Dobson's premises was little short of a disaster; according to Mr. Dobson's un-

spoken, but well understood, theory, such a display of idleness on the part of an assistant was liable to give customers the impression that trade was slack and the "young lady" on that account unoccupied.

"Oh dear," Kitty sighed regretfully; "you must be careful, Di, you really must, if you want to stay on."

"The question is," Diana returned recklessly, "do I want to stay on?"

Remembering the state of her friend's finances Kitty's eyes grew wide with horror and she clutched at Diana's hand.

"Oh, Di, you do—for the present you do, dear!"

"For the present," Diana echoed sullenly. "It 's all very well for you to talk about the present, Kit, you 've got a future —I have n't."

Kitty's lip trembled and her eyes shone in silent reproach and then fell. It was

Miss Smithers who, still resentful and seeing her opportunity for a hit, chimed in in her most practical tones—

"Miss Brant 's quite right, Miss Massingberd; you 'll have to mind your p's and q's if you don't want to go. Of course, you know your own business best —but as I 've heard you say you 're all alone in the world, with nobody to look to; and as I don't suppose you've been able to save very much since you were taken on here—"

"Save—good Lord, me save!" Diana jeered. "On thirteen pounds a year—five bob a week—with my clothes to find and my fines to pay!"

There was an instant's uncomfortable silence. For the second time that day Miss Massingberd had transgressed an unwritten law.

"I suppose you know, Miss Massingberd," Miss Smithers said stiffly, "that

the firm prefers that the assistants should n't discuss the amount of their salaries."

"Yes, I know it," Diana flared, "and I don't wonder—I 'm glad the firm has the grace to be ashamed of itself sometimes. Well, I 'm not bound to consider its feelings and I shall discuss the amount of my salary—my totally inadequate salary—as often as I like! I get five bob a week—with deductions—and I don't care who knows it; I only wish I could proclaim it from the housetops. Five bob a week for fourteen hours' work a day—five bob a week for the use of my health and strength—five bob a week for my *life!* And I have n't the shadow of a doubt that a good many others here are in the same box."

Miss Smithers snapped her thread viciously, stuck her needle into the front of her bodice and rose to her feet.

"Well, I 'm going to bed. I don 't know if you 've found it out or not, but that clock 's slow—I believe it 's a good bit past the half-hour really."

"Is it?" There was a general pushing back of chairs—the gas in the dormitories had to be out on the stroke of eleven. A good many of the girls, wearied with the long day's work, had already slipped off to their beds and, on Miss Smithers' hint, everyone, except Diana Massingberd, prepared to follow their example. She, alone, as if she had not heard the words, sat on at the table with her chin resting on her hand and her eyes staring downwards at the soiled tartan cloth.

Kitty Brant lingered, folding her unfinished letter and wiping her scratchy pen, until Miss Whitehead had shuffled through the door yawning good night, extracting hair-pins from her coiffure; then, with a sudden pitying impulse, she

sidled up to Diana and slipped an arm round the elder girl's neck.

"Di, what 's the matter—what 's come over you lately? You use n't to be like this. I know you always hated the work but it 's only the last week or two you 've been so terribly discontented."

Diana laughed drearily.

"Oh, it 's been coming on a great deal longer than that. I 'm a brute, Kitty, to worry you with my growlings—but I can't help myself. I have fits of this sort of thing; they come and take hold of you, every now and then, when you realize what your life might be—and what it is—all the squalor and the meanness and the grind and the hopelessness. I 'm about at the end of my tether, Kit."

"But why?" Kitty persisted gently. "What is the matter just now—in particular?"

"There is n't anything particular the

matter. That 's just it. Everything is going on the same as usual. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, amen."

She swung round suddenly in her chair and took Kitty's thin little face almost fiercely between her two hands.

"You lucky little devil—you lucky little devil—you 're going to get out of it all. How I envy you—how we every one of us envy you, Kitty! In three months' time you 'll be married—and, however your marriage turns out, it will be a change from Dobson's hosiery department. . . . Oh, I did n't mean to hurt you, dear. I 'm a beast to say such a thing—I only said it because I 'm hideously jealous of you. You can afford to forgive me, Kit, for in three months' time you'll have done with Dobson's. Think of it—think of it—you 'll have done with the nagging and the standing and this horrible bare room,

smelling of gas and dinners—and the dormitory with the damp oozing through the walls. You 'll have done with Pringle's sour face—you 'll have done with the rules—the hateful, niggling rules—and the whole starved, petty life. But I have n't done with it and it does n't seem to me I ever shall."

Her hands slipped from Kitty's face and she turned her head away and swallowed the lump in her throat. Racking her brain in vain for a word of comfort, Kitty stood beside her in dumb perplexity and pity. Diana's fingers tattooed fiercely on the table for a moment and then she flung back her head and went on—

"Of course I know I sha'n't be here much longer—I can quite see that. Dobson will sack me, as Grinlay's and half a dozen others have sacked me, because I can't help showing them how I loathe them and their tyrannies. But when I 'm

fired out from here, I shall only start the same old grind somewhere else—all over and over again. The delectable atmosphere of Dobson's will follow me about wherever I go—oh, you know it will, Kitty, you know it will. I shall crawl round, cringing to be taken on somewhere else at the same starvation salary and then settle down in the same stuffy dormitory with the same mean little rules to obey. I shall serve the same stream of unintelligent customers, and bolt my dinner off the same tough meat in the same depressing dining-room with the same mustard-colored paper on the walls. And that 's what I was born for, Kit, that 's all that life has to give me. And there are people out in the world, people only a little way off, no better and no worse than I am—who get up in the morning and say to themselves 'I will do this because I want and like to do it—because *I* want to

do it,' mind you. Those are the people who live. Kitty, I only exist. I sometimes feel—I feel to-night—as if I would give my immortal soul to live—just live—for a week!"

She jerked back her chair from the table, and, with a gesture of impatient misery, strode across the room and leaned her head upon the mantelpiece, hiding her face in her hand.

"You 'd better go up to bed, Kitty," she said after a moment's silence. "It 's close on a quarter to eleven. I 'm coming in a moment, but I don't want the others to see I 've been crying. I 'm sorry I 've talked to you like this. You can't do any good and I only make you miserable—it 's disgustingly selfish of me. Now, run along, or you won't have time to do your hair before the light goes out."

"You won't be long," Kitty pleaded, as she gathered up pen, ink and blotting-

paper. "Miss Pringle may come in, and she doesn't like it if we are not in our rooms by a quarter to eleven."

"No, I won't be long—less than five minutes."

The door closed behind Kitty Brant and Diana stood staring down into the grate. What she had said to the younger girl was true; every now and then an overwhelming passion of resentment at the hardships of her daily life boiled up fiercely within her and had to find an outlet. As often as not that outlet had been found in a reckless defiance of the powers that be—with the result that the powers that be had speedily decided to dispense with her services. The very violence with which her feelings were expressed on such occasions usually brought about a reaction—a phase of nervous exhaustion and dull submission, more or less sullen, to the conditions of her narrow

routine. Then, gradually, the sore would chafe again, the narrow round become more hateful and more hideous, the day's unvaried toil more intolerable—and when the iron had entered deeply enough into her soul another outburst would be due. Of all women in the world Diana Massingberd was the least fitted by nature to live under an order of things which gives scope to petty tyranny; and the regulations of the "living-in" system which, to more orderly natures, might have been merely vexatious and unpleasant, to her were an insult and an injury combined.

It was not alone an inborn independence of temperament which utterly unfitted her for a life hemmed in by regulations; her training had been everything that a shop assistant's ought not to be. The only child of a country doctor—a hard-worked, improvident, good-natured Irishman—from the age of thirteen she

had ruled his household, after his own improvident fashion, to her complete satisfaction and the detriment of her education. She was over twenty-one when Dr. Massingberd took to his bed with an attack of double pneumonia and died within a week, leaving to his daughter, as her sole heritage, a few unpaid debts.

There had been a consultation of the dead man's solicitor and an unknown cousin or two who had turned up for the funeral and who made no secret of their desire to repudiate responsibility for Diana's future, as soon as the position was made clear for them. Before her father was laid in the ground Diana had begun to realize what it meant to be a superfluous woman, and, with a bitter resentment that divided her heart with grief, she listened to her relatives' emphatic pronouncements on the duty of earning her own living and the impos-

sibility of expecting aid from others. She acquiesced readily enough in the suggestion—with a scorn but partially disguised for the motives of those who proffered it, but without any serious misgivings as to her powers of self-support. Those came later, when it had been borne in upon her that a course of miscellaneous reading, a habit of independent thinking and a capacity for apt and sarcastic speech are not the best qualifications for a wage-earning machine.

She was still numb from the shock of her father's death when she found herself installed behind the counter of a large London draper's. The establishment was a fairly good one of its class, which was not the highest. In one belonging to a higher grade a heavy premium would have been demanded, and Diana's relatives were anxious to get her off their hands as inexpensively as possible. The girl

fell in with their arrangements unresistingly—and exchanged her careless, unordered life for an existence whose every hour was mapped out and confined, where liberty was not and every harmless impulse came in contact with a rule. To her, from the first, the place was a prison; it was not only that she suffered physically from the close confinement, lack of air, bad food and long hours of weary standing; the mental atmosphere at the same time stifled and irritated her. She held on for something over six months and then, with a pound or two in her pocket, broke out, in the hope of bettering herself.

The hope was vain. By the time her funds had melted away and she had secured another berth, she found that she had merely exchanged the frying-pan for the fire and, before long, was looking back regretfully upon her first experience of "living-in." And so life had gone on for

her during the past six years—a thing to be resented and endured. She had made one or two efforts to extricate herself from the toils of the drapery trade, always without success. Always, for lack of funds, she had drifted back to her place behind the counter, to the common bedroom and the common dining-room, to the subjection that her individuality loathed and rebelled against. She was twenty-eight now, and the unreasoning hopes of early youth had died in her soul; she felt that life was slipping from her, with its beauties unknown and its passions and possibilities unfathomed; and her heart cried out within her against the fate that had denied to her the exercise of the power she felt she possessed—the power of living, and living to the uttermost.

CHAPTER II

THE allotted five minutes and more had gone by when Diana roused herself, glanced at the clock, gave her reddened eyes a final dab with her crumpled handkerchief, and made for the dormitory which she shared with Kitty Brant, Miss Smithers, Miss Jay and Miss Morton. As she flung open the door Miss Jay's voice broke off suddenly in the middle of a sentence and Miss Smithers began to hum as she brushed out the twist of hair she had removed from the top of her head to her knee. Diana smiled sarcastically; even if Kitty's face had not worn a troubled, resentful expression, she would have guessed that the other two had been discussing her in uncomplimentary terms.

"Where 's Miss Morton?" Miss Jay demanded, as she added another to the row of steel curling-pins which encased her yellow head like a helmet.

"It 's her evening out," Kitty returned from the folds of a pink flannelette night-gown. "If she is n't back soon she 'll have to go to bed in the dark—it 's close on eleven. Hurry up, Di."

"All right—I 'm hurrying," Diana returned as she seated herself on the battered tin box at the foot of her bed—the box that contained all her earthly possessions, with the exception of a shabby black jacket hanging on the door. Four other boxes, of varying shapes and sizes, were ranged at the foot of the four other beds—and beds and boxes together comprised the greater part of the furniture of the dormitory. A couple of small iron washstands were planted one at each end of the room, a chair, rickety by rea-

son of a shortened leg, stood before a shabby dressing-table placed beneath the one gas-jet; and a wooden-framed looking-glass, with a crack across the whole face, hung above it. The same paper—the mustard-colored paper abhorred by Diana—that adorned the dining-room likewise adorned the dormitory and, as in the dining-room was diversified by damp, and dirt stains. There were no pictures on the walls; one of the hundred and twenty-seven rules of the establishment forbade the driving in of a nail under the penalty of a fine of threepence; and the only attempt at decoration consisted of a couple of cheaply framed photographs of two badly posed and undecorative young men which Miss Jay had arranged upon the mantelpiece above the walled-in grate. The sole adornment provided by the firm was a large notice in close proximity to the gas-bracket stat-

ing that a fine of five shillings would be inflicted on any young lady found using a "jigger"—a "jigger" being a contrivance on which, when attached to the gas-bracket, a tired or chilly assistant might presume to boil herself a cup of cocoa at her own expense.

To the cold, comfortless atmosphere of the dormitory Diana's presence had added a touch of antagonism and, after Miss Jay's query and Kitty's reply, silence reigned for the space of three or four minutes. Miss Smithers, in black corsets and a striped moirette petticoat, finished arranging her artificial tresses for the morrow and applied herself to the combing of those that grew on her head; and Miss Jay, having completed the composition of the helmet, had begun hurriedly to divest herself of her petticoat and bodice when the carpetless stairs creaked to the tread of hurried footsteps

and a breathless girl dashed into the room, pulling off her jacket as she ran.

"Just in time," she gasped. "I 've run all the way from the 'bus. I was afraid I should n't get in till after eleven, and I do so hate going to bed in the dark—I never can find my things. Oh, Miss Massingberd, did n't you see this letter for you? It was on the hall table. Here you are."

She tossed the letter to Diana, jerked her coat onto a peg on the door, flung her hat on the bed and began to wrench at her refractory bootlaces, pouring out meanwhile a flood of chatter on the evening's doing with her cousins in Balham. Miss Jay chimed in with eager, nasal questions. On a previous evening out she had made the acquaintance of Miss Morton's cousin Albert, and was not without hopes of adding a third to the

photographic collection on the mantelpiece.

Meanwhile, Diana, under the gas-jet, had surveyed and then opened her letter—slowly and with interest, a letter being an unusual event in her life. The handwriting of the address was formal, clerkly, uninviting; the inside to all appearances equally so. She glanced at the signature —Hubert Crampton—unknown; and began to read.

"Re E. C. Cooper deceased. Dear Madam—"

Miss Jay and Miss Morton at the other end of the room were chattering volubly; Kitty was about to bestow herself between the sheets, and Miss Smithers had just drawn her nightgown from its hiding-place under the pillow, when a sharp, almost frightened cry from Diana turned every head in her direction.

"Girls—girls!"

She was standing erect under the gas-jet, her eyes wide and shining and her face white except for two red spots that had suddenly appeared on her cheek-bones. Kitty was at her side in an instant amid a rush of exclamations from the others.

"What 's the matter, Miss Massingberd?"

"Di, are you ill?"

"Has anything happened?"

"What on earth is it?"

"The letter—the letter!" Diana gasped. "Read it someone—read it to me. No, no"—and she snatched it back from Kitty's outstretched hand—"Let me read it again myself first."

"Is it bad news, dear—oh, I hope it 's not bad news."

"Bad news—*bad* news?" Diana's voice went up in a trembling laugh that,

to her hearers, betokened hysterics and Miss Morton dashed to the washstand to fill the tooth-glass with water.

"No, no, I 'm all right—I 'm all right," Diana laughed, thrusting it aside. "Only I feel as if I can't believe it. It 's this letter—the letter Miss Morton brought me. Fancy, it must have been lying in the hall since the last post came in, and I never noticed—never knew. If I had, how I should have dashed for it—"

"But what 's it all about—who is it from? What does it say?" Miss Smithers interposed.

"It 's from a lawyer—a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields. It says that a cousin of my father's—Edward Chamberlain Cooper, a distant cousin whom I never knew and who was in some sort of business in Manchester—died suddenly a little while ago without leaving a will. That 's the point—he did n't leave a will, so his

money had to be divided up among the next of kin. And I 'm one of them—one of the next of kin—and they 've been trying to trace me for weeks—and I get three hundred pounds."

The color had spread all over her face now; her eyes had lost the fear with which they had at first looked upon happiness and for the first time since they had known her, her companions heard her laugh without bitterness. A chorus of congratulations broke out and Kitty flung two flanneletted arms around her neck.

"Three hundred pounds—oh, you lucky girl!"

"Yes, three hundred pounds—three hundred pounds," Diana repeated, rolling the words over her lips and rocking her body backwards and forwards in rhythmic accompaniment to them. "I could hardly believe it at first—it seemed impossible that such a thing could happen

to me. But there 's no doubt about it; it 's here in black and white—the money has been waiting for me while I 've been drudging and slaving here. Girls, I'm not a pauper any longer. I 've got three hundred pounds."

"And what are you going to do with it?" Miss Jay demanded.

"Heavens, I have n't thought yet—all sorts of things. But I 'll stand you all a treat on Sunday to begin with, and Kitty shall have a wedding present. What shall it be, Kit?"

"You must n't be extravagant," Kitty protested. "Whatever you do, don't waste the money, dear. You ought to put it straight in the bank."

Diana's eyes danced recklessly.

"Put it in the bank, goose! What 's the good of that?"

"Of course not." This from Miss Smithers, the practical. "Banks don't

pay interest; you should invest it in something safe."

Diana wheeled round upon her with a touch of the old antagonism.

"That 's your idea, is it? Well, it is n't mine. Invest it and get nine or ten pounds a year at the outside? No, thank you; not good enough. I understand what can be bought for money a good deal better than you do, and now I 've got three hundred pounds I intend to have some fun out of it."

"You 'll chuck Dobson's, I suppose," Miss Morton conjectured enviously.

"Chuck Dobson's—what do *you* think? The money 's waiting for me—Mr. Crampton says so—and you don't suppose I shall stop in this beastly den a moment longer than I can help. Dobson's hosiery department has seen the last of me, I can tell you. I 'd clear out to-night,

if it was n't so late. No, I would n't though, because—"

She stopped and laughed quietly, rubbing her hands gently together.

"Because why?" Miss Jay queried.

"Because if I took my hook to-night, I should n't be able to see Mr. Dobson in the morning and tell him what I think of him."

If Mr. Dobson could have seen her face at that moment his head would have rested less easily upon his pillow—for Diana's tongue was sharp and the foretaste of revenge was sweet in Diana's mouth.

"You 're not really going to?" Miss Jay giggled.

"Not going to? You wait till to-morrow morning, and then you 'll see what you 'll see and hear what you 'll hear."

"Oh, Di," Kitty protested nervously.

Diana clapped a caressing hand over her mouth.

"Shut up, Kitty, you don't understand —you don't any of you understand— what money really means. It 's power— the one thing worth having. Power to do what you like, to go where you like, to say what you like. It 's only people with money who can treat themselves to free speech. Because I 've got three hundred pounds in my pocket, I shall be able to enjoy the priceless luxury of telling Mr. Septimus Dobson to his fat, white face what we all of us whisper behind his mean, old back."

"You won't dare?" Miss Morton gasped in trembling admiration.

"Dare!" Diana flung out her arm magnificently. "With three hundred pounds in my pocket I 'd dare anything on earth!"

The others looked on in appalled envy.

The spirit of power and adventure was upon her as she sat there, half-dressed, with her bare arms clasped round her petticoated knees. To the extent of three hundred pounds, the world was hers, life and the enjoyment of life. The knowledge intoxicated her and she was as capable of wisdom as a drunkard in his cups.

Miss Smithers, quite impervious to anything but the practical side of affairs, descended on her in the character of a wet blanket.

"It seems to me, Miss Massingberd, that you 're forgetting that three hundred pounds won't last forever."

Diana only needed opposition to encourage her, and she welcomed it with cheerful antagonism.

"Oh no, I 'm not; but while it does last I intend to have everything I want—everything."

"Oh, Di, don't do anything silly," Kitty remonstrated.

Miss Smithers sniffed disapprobation.

"It won't last you long at that rate, Miss Massingberd."

"I 'm quite aware of that, Miss Smithers —but I don't care. The three hundred pounds are mine, and I shall do exactly what I please with them. Who was it said something about a crowded hour of glorious life—anybody remember? I 'm sure I don't and it does n't much matter. The point is that that 's what I 'm going to have—a crowded hour—and it *shall* be crowded."

Her eyes defied her listeners' objections, as she went on rapidly, her hands flying out, now and again, in eager gesticulation.

"What 's the use of letting the money dribble away through my fingers by de-

grees? What's the use? I want to know, not to look on—to live, can't you understand? For once in my existence I'll have a royal time. I'll deny myself nothing—nothing, do you hear, Miss Smithers? Life is sensations—new sensations. I'd rather live for a month than vegetate for sixty years. That's what I shall do. I've had six years of scrape or starve. Now I'll have a month of everything that money can buy me, and there are very few things that money can't buy me—precious few!"

The glow of her reckless magnificence had communicated itself to the three younger girls, even to the anxious Kitty. Only Miss Smithers repeated her disapproving sniff.

"That means?" Diana inquired politely.

"I was only wondering what you would

do when the money is all spent?" Miss Smithers explained, while Kitty's eyes again grew anxious.

"When it is all spent?" Diana repeated.

"Yes?" Miss Smithers challenged.

"When it is all spent, I shall go back, I suppose—back to the treadmill grind—or whatever comes next. But I shall have something to remember; I shall be able to look back at my crowded hour—my one little bit of life. That would n't mean much to you, but it will mean a great deal to me. For one month I shall have had my freedom; I shall have done what I chose, what I liked—not what I was forced to, not what I was ordered to. And that will be something to the good, something to remember—for me. Something you can't understand."

She sprang up suddenly and flung out her arms, almost upsetting Kitty in the process.

"But I 'm not going to think of the afterwards. I 'm going to think of the *now*. What shall I do, Kit, eh? Any suggestions, girls? For one thing I shall travel —I 've always longed and craved to see something of the world besides one narrow, ugly little piece of it."

"Where shall you go?" Miss Morton inquired.

"Have n't thought yet, but, of course, I shall begin with Paris."

"Paris!" The listeners' eyes glistened approvingly. To the English middle-class the very name suggests attractive impropriety.

"Paris," Diana nodded, "to buy my clothes."

"I say, you are going it!" Miss Jay sniggered admiringly.

"I 'll know what it is to wear a decently-cut frock before I die," Diana went on. "Also boots that cost more than seven and

eleven-pence a pair. I mean to have the best of everything, I tell you; and you can't beat Paris for clothes, so Paris is the place for my money. In a week's time if you could see me you would n't know me—this sort of thing will be in the rag-bag by then."

A contemptuous kick sent the skirt she had discarded halfway across the floor.

"Then when I 've got my clothes, I shall go on—move about. Switzerland, Italy—no, not Italy now, it will be too hot for Italy—wherever I feel inclined."

"Oh, it will be lovely," Kitty sighed, "too lovely for anything, Di, but you ought n't—"

"No 'buts,'" Diana threatened, "no 'buts,' Kitty. I am not going to have any 'buts' for the next month. When I leave Paris I shall go somewhere in the mountains, I think, for part of the time—I 've always longed to see real mountains.

Just think, the loveliness of them after London, girls—hot, smelly, stuffy London. It 's a shame to talk like this to you, though, when you 've all got to stick here."

"Never mind," Miss Morton said philosophically. "You can't be expected to take us all with you, and you 're standing us a bust-up on Sunday, you know. Go on—tell us some more about what you 're going to do."

Diana cast a sidelong glance at Miss Smithers.

"Well, of course, I shall stay at the best hotels—the most expensive hotels. By the way, I think I shall wear a wedding-ring and call myself Mrs. Massingberd."

"Mrs. Massingberd—why?"

"Oh, you can do so much more what you like—travel alone and all that. You 're ever so much freer when you 're married—especially when your husband's dead. I shall be a widow!"

Even Miss Smithers joined in the chorus of laughter that greeted the announcement—and then, suddenly breaking off, she sprang to her feet.

"Miss Pringle!" she gasped. "It 's twenty past eleven—the gas—"

It was too late to turn it out. The top stair creaked, the light must have been visible through the chinks of the door. Kitty, the only one arrayed in night attire, flung herself into bed and the others effaced themselves as far as possible, Diana excepted. As the door swung open and Miss Pringle, gaunt and indignant, stalked into the room, Miss Massingberd sat herself down upon the box at the end of her bed, lifted up her voice and sang softly. It was a psalm of infinite rejoicing that her enemy was delivered into her hand.

Miss Pringle surveyed the scene—the vacant beds, the frightened girls, above all,

the burning gas—with eyes that glared amazement. It is to be presumed that Mr. Dobson's forewoman had once been young—but she had forgotten that. It is to be presumed that she once had suffered under those who had been set in authority over her—that she had forgotten that also. Her method of inflicting verbal chastisement was to prepare the way for it by an awful silence. Diana sang on.

Miss Pringle's black dress rustled vigorously; and she spoke.

"I should be obliged if you would inform me what is the meaning of the noise and uproar I heard from downstairs—also why, in defiance of Mr. Dobson's rules, the gas is alight in this dormitory after eleven o'clock at night? Miss Massingberd, was it your voice I heard as I came up the stairs?"

Diana swung round upon her box and —oh, the exquisite perfection of the mo-

ment!—for the first time faced her enemy without fear.

"Miss Pringle—it was!"

The impudence of the avowal reddened Miss Pringle's face. She stiffened herself with a glance intended to wither.

"Then—" she began; but Diana cut her short.

"The usual thing, I suppose?" she smiled encouragingly. "Gas burning in the dormitory after eleven o'clock—sixpence all round. We need n't trouble you to repeat the formula—it 's taken as read. Never mind, girls"—she waved her arm comprehensively round the room—"do n't you worry. I 'm standing treat for this little lot."

Miss Pringle was a past-mistress in the art of attack; the art of defence she had hitherto neglected as useless and unnecessary. Her encounters with the assistants usually resulted in a walk-over for

herself—the other party to the one-sided combat merely imploring such quarter as she chose to give. This was something new, and even while she swelled with rage she felt sudden qualms as to the issue of the combat. In tones of sepulchral authority she ejaculated, "Miss Massingberd," and paused—hoping that would be enough.

Diana bowed suavely from the box.

"Miss Pringle?"

Something more was needed. Miss Pringle pulled herself together.

"Do you wish me to report you to Mr. Dobson?"

The joy of battle was hot in Miss Massingberd's heart—the very perfect pleasure of a good fighter danced in Miss Massingberd's eyes. Lo, how the world was changed to her through the magic of three hundred pounds! Enthroned she sat upon the old tin trunk, with the earth

at her feet and her enemy beneath them.

"Do I wish you to report me to Mr. Dobson—for more unbusinesslike conduct? Certainly, if you like. Please yourself about it. I really don't care a row of brass pins."

Amazed, bewildered, Miss Pringle would have retreated, had she dared to confess to defeat before the four spectators of the fray. She quivered with fury, hesitated, and charged again.

"Are you out of your senses, Miss Massingberd?"

Diana accepted the suggestion with a bland smile.

"Now you mention it, I do feel rather like it."

The need for self-encouragement as much as a desire to daunt the enemy prompted Miss Pringle's next thrust.

"You 'll be sorry for this impertinence to-morrow."

Miss Massingberd's smile grew blander and she shook her head.

"I assure you, you are entirely mistaken. The combination of astonishment and fury on your face will always remain with me as a pleasing memory—grateful and comforting. I may add that the effect is singularly unbecoming."

A piercing giggle from Miss Jay squealed out by the corner bed. Miss Pringle wheeled viciously, and the miserable culprit strove in vain to stifle her guilt with the aid of a flannel petticoat and a new-found throat affection. Encouraged by the sight of her cowering confusion, Miss Pringle tried again.

"Miss Massingberd," she began majestically—

"Allow me to remind you," Diana interposed, "that you 've made that remark before. If you 've nothing to add to it, I 'm sure we need n't detain you any

longer. I 'll turn out the gas when I 've done with it, thank you—which won't be for a few minutes yet."

And she swung round indifferently and began to pull out hair-pins from her tumbled head.

"Miss Massingberd, I believe you 're drunk."

Four simultaneous "ohs!" long drawn and horrified, came shivering across the room—and Diana rose in her might. Not in wrath, but in triumph; not insulted, but exultant.

"You may believe any mortal thing you like, you may say any mortal thing you like—because what you choose to believe and what you choose to think are matters of complete indifference to me now. It has ceased to matter to me in the very least whether you are satisfied with me or whether you are n't; whether you fine me or whether you don't. This morning the

stony glare in your eye would have made me shiver; to-night it merely makes me smile. In short, Miss Pringle, you are no longer in a position to bully me, so take my advice and don't try it on. I can call my soul my own now."

Miss Pringle, dumbfounded, tried to stare down the impudent eyes—and failed. Then, in her dire need, she called once more upon the name of high authority.

"Miss Massingberd, the first thing in the morning—the very first thing in the morning—I shall make it my business to inform Mr. Dobson—"

"Damn Mr. Dobson!" said Diana heartily.

Then, while the girls sat stiff and Miss Pringle reeled, she strode across the room and turned the gas up higher.

"And the same remark," she added, "applies to yourself. Good-night."

Miss Pringle—went.

BOOK II

CHAPTER III

DIANA MASSINGBERD sat on the deck of the Dover-Calais boat. The day had dropped from heaven and circular notes to the value of three hundred pounds—minus the price of a tailor-made suit, a first-class ticket to Paris, a traveling-trunk and a treat to the girls—were buttoned inside her jacket. Therefore, she was glad to be alive.

The sense of a great adventure was on her soul; she was a prisoner broken free, with the world to choose from and command. For a short month she was mistress of her fate and it behooved her to see that her fate served her well, and that every moment had its meed of pleasure.

So far she was fully satisfied with her

achievements. The wreaking of vengeance upon Pringle had been followed next morning by the routing of Dobson; Diana's eyes rippled as she lived the scene again. The victory in the latter case had been no less signal than in the former. Before the eyes of his trembling assistants—yea, more, before the eyes of his astounded customers—she had smitten Mr. Septimus Dobson hip and thigh, from one end of the hosiery department to the other till, in ignominious confusion, he took refuge behind the door of his office and turned the key thereof. Then, and then only, with a joy in her heart and exultation in her eyes, Diana had shaken the dust of Dobson's from her skirts, and, being without the price of a bus-fare, proceeded on foot to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Since then life had been exquisite with the sense of possession. She had become, as it were, a part of the world from which

she had hitherto been cut off—was in it and owned it. It was for her and her money that the shops in Regent Street displayed their wares and decked their windows; it was for her that cabmen plied and watched, for her that waiters smiled and hustled and railway porters made things easy. The atmosphere of deference, of courtesy and consideration in which she had lived since she swept out of Dobson's was as exhilarating as wine.

The sullen, white-lipped drudge of a few days ago was a creature poles apart from the radiant, adventurous Diana who stood with her hands upon the rail while the steamer churned and thudded her way between the Calais piers. Everything was a new sensation and a joy—the rush aboard of turbulent, shouting Frenchmen as the boat came to a standstill at the quay, the hurried formalities of the custom-house, the engaging and interested atten-

tions of the porter who conveyed her to the Paris train—and whom Diana, being by nature an aristocrat, rewarded with a regal tip. Not even the flat, unvaried aspect of the country through which the train wound its way could rob her journey of its enjoyment; she saw even the dull fields and box-like, way-side stations through a veil of mystery and romance.

Beyond "Paris for clothes" she had formed no plans for the present. Nor had she, as yet, felt much need of society or sympathy; her changed position was, in itself, delight enough, and there was a subtle irony about the way in which she was taken at her face value that was a never-ceasing source of amusement and delight. What, she asked herself, would be the feelings of the portly Englishman and his wife who shared her table in the luncheon-car and finally unbent to her smiling advances, if they knew that their

companion had escaped only a few days before from the slavery of a low-class suburban shop? Would they be openly resentful, she wondered, or merely condescending? Of one thing, at least, she was certain; they would cease to treat her as a human being like-minded and like-natured with themselves. Their unimportant conversation amused and interested her; the difference between their point of view and her own gave to their speech almost the character of an unfamiliar language—a language she had nearly forgotten during the last six years, but which, now and again, was oddly reminiscent of her youth and childhood. Listening to it, she realized, as she had never realized before, the width of the great gulf fixed between those who work that they may eat and those who toil not, neither do they spin. She parted from them upon the platform of the Gare du

Nord, having learned much from them.

The London tourist office at which she had taken her ticket to Paris had recommended a suitable hotel—quiet but comfortable. To her it was the last word in luxury and before she turned out the electric light that night she lay on her pillows fingering the soft sheets, admiring the neat appointments of the room, and listening to the dull murmur from the adjoining Boulevard des Capucines. It seemed to her like the very whisper of life, the audible expression of her untranslatable desires.

With the morning came business—clothes. Before setting out she held consultation with the manageress of the hotel—a stout, smiling Frenchwoman, delighted to give advice to Madame, and with, no doubt, a weather eye upon commission—as to the shops where her money might be expended to the best advantage.

The advice was good, if not always entirely disinterested; and for the next few days Diana shopped and ordered. The process was a pure delight; she was in heaven and the possessor of things which, a fortnight ago, had seemed far more inaccessible than heaven. When her first evening dress came home she locked the door of her bedroom and peacocked for an hour before the glass.

In the intervals of shopping she drifted hither and thither through Paris—once or twice with acquaintances picked up at the hotel, but usually alone. To sight-seeing proper, she was indifferent; in fact, the sense that it was her duty to see certain things was sufficient to make her leave them severely alone. She liked to be free, to have no plan, to go where impulse took her. Once she wandered into Notre Dame and another time floated idly into Les Invalides, not knowing what it was

until, with a dim, overmastering awe, she found herself looking down upon that which hides the body of the restless man who tore Europe to tatters in his time; but the Louvre, the Pantheon, Versailles, she avoided, and her Paris as a whole, was the Paris of the shops and streets.

For a few days it satisfied her utterly, and then came the desire for something more. The atmosphere of idleness and liberty had ceased to be sufficient in itself; suddenly there rushed upon her the need for closer contact with humanity than could be afforded in a crowd and she felt as if she were wasting her time when worlds on worlds remained to be conquered. She would be off on her travels next morning. The question was, whither?

She turned into Cook's office in the Place de l'Opera decided only upon mountains—mountains and men and women

with whom she could laugh and talk and make merry. Men and women who would give her the deference that was the due of Mrs. Massingberd's Paris gowns; and mountains, cool and grateful after the heat of sun-beaten pavements.

There was a little crowd round the counter and the clerks were busy. Diana stood idly waiting, turning over some colored pamphlets glorifying various Swiss resorts and drawing her forehead into frowning consideration of their several merits. A hearty masculine greeting behind her made her turn her head; two ruddy-faced young Englishmen had run against each other unexpectedly.

"Hello, what are you doing here? Passing through?

"Yes. Going to Interlaken with the mater and the girls. We ought to have been there by now, but, by ill luck, one of the mater's boxes vanished on the journey

from London—fallen overboard or something—and has n't turned up yet. Nothing will induce her to stir without it, so here we are—stuck down in Paris. I 've just come in here to make inquiries about the blessed thing. Where are you off to?"

"Pontresina to begin with. Gregory and I are going to do some climbing. Know Pontresina at all?"

"No—somewhere along the Engadine, is n't it?"

"That way—not far from St. Moritz. Ripping place—I was there two years ago—awfully good climbing and lots going on there, too—plenty of decent people; not one of those dull holes where there's nothing to do in the evening except go to bed."

The pair drifted away towards the counter; Diana glanced at them—and made up her mind. She was a believer in

luck and in allowing herself to drift along with the stream of chance; the young man's recommendation of Pontresina should decide her. The name was attractive—soft-sounding and flowing—the Engadine hinted at luxury and fashion. Further, the speaker had the clean-bred, upper-class air; decent people to him must mean people with money, with leisure—the people with whom Diana desired to mix. As the two young men turned away from the counter, she took their place.

"I want a first-class ticket to Pontresina, please," she said. "How do you get there?"

"Book to Samaden," the youth replied briskly. "Drive from Samaden station. Via Basle, Zurich and Coire. Quickest way of getting there, Engadine express—train de luxe, extra fare—leave Gare de l'Est 7.45 p. m., arrive Samaden half-past twelve next day."

"That 'll do," Diana nodded. "Give me a ticket, please."

And five minutes later, having ascertained that, in the opinion of the brisk youth, the Hotel Engadine was the smartest and most desirable hotel in Pontresina, she turned out of the office with her ticket in her pocket. She wired for rooms in the Hotel Engadine, packed her new garments with tissue-paper and caressing admiration and that night left Paris. . . . She slept comfortably to the drone of rolling wheels and with the morning she was among the mountains.

She never forgot her first glimpse of them, aloof and unstained. They were incredible; a pageant of nature that would pass. Then, as they stayed, came a feeling strange to her for the last six years—reverence, of human sensation the purest, which does not flourish in the by-ways and squalor of cities. It seemed as if the clean

air from them swept through her soul, making it humble and more worthy. She sat entranced at the window, grateful to the majesty that revealed itself at every curve of the line. It was almost a shock to descend at the station and hold intercourse with the commonplace little human beings who crawled round majesty's feet.

To breathless reverence succeeded wild exhilaration as she drove along with the clean breath of the Alps on her face. But for the driver, she would have sung aloud and shouted, she was so unreasonably, so intolerably happy. And a fortnight ago she had been at Dobson's, without a thought of what was before her. Could one and the same world hold things so utterly dissimilar as a noisy suburban thoroughfare and the high calm of the Alps? She held cheerful converse with the driver, delighted in his quaint English, and repeating after him the names

of the various heights and villages as he pointed them out to her—Laret, Piz, Landguard, Piz Albris, Spiert. The chalets with their sloping roofs were unreal, yet familiar, they took her back to the nursery and a toy made in their image; you turned the handle and, to the accompaniment of a tinkle from within, the whole Swiss family, including cow and goat, marched in parade across the verandah. She had never felt so young.

"Hotel Engadine—zere," the driver pointed.

Diana surveyed it with approving eyes and decided that she had done well to act on the brisk youth's recommendation. The Hotel Engadine was clearly a desirable, if expensive place of residence; the proprietor's manner was all that a hotel-keeper's should be and her room on the first floor looked upon the glories of the valley and the heights. She washed and

arranged her hair, surveying her smiling face in the glass, conscious that her neat traveling-suit was becoming and that, the long night journey notwithstanding, she looked her best. Then she ran downstairs to the dining-room hungry for lunch.

The room was full, the white-clothed tables all, or nearly all, occupied. She halted inside the door and looked round for a vacant place, well aware that she was being critically surveyed from every side but, after her satisfactory interview with the looking-glass, not at all disturbed by the knowledge. The head-waiter bowed and hurried forward, indicating a spot farther along the room; a second waiter drew out a chair at a table on the verandah side, occupied only by one person—an elderly man. She sank into the chair, took the unfolded napkin handed to her, glanced at the menu, gave her orders and leaned back

contentedly. Then, suddenly, her spine stiffened and her heart stood still.

She had met her neighbor's eyes—the eyes of the man on the opposite side of the table. They were gray under grayish eyebrows and were fixed upon her own sharply yet uncertainly. The keen lean face was puzzled and expectant—and with a thrill of horror she knew that the man was on the verge of recognition.

If he was as yet uncertain of her identity she had no doubts as to his. Less than a year ago she had eaten her bread with tears in one of the innumerable shops that bore the name of Jabez Grinlay, Limited. In the mantle department at Grinlay's, as in the hosiery department at Dobson's, she had writhed under the heel of authority and finally revolted. A petulant, nervous outburst had cost her her place; her conduct had been brought to the notice of Mr. Grinlay himself by the

manager of his Clapham establishment and Miss Massingberd's shrift had been short.

She had only come face to face with him on the one occasion in which he discharged her; but she had heard of him since. His name had appeared in that year's list of "Birthday Honours"; he was now Sir Jabez Grinlay, Baronet, first of the name and—unless he married late in life—likely to be the last. A donation, running into four figures, to a charitable fund patronized by Royalty and boomed by newspapers was said to have procured him his dignity. What else had he done to deserve it, except acquire money, no human being knew.

Instinctively Diana flashed her eyes away from her neighbor's and turned her face to the valley; one sign of recognition on her part might give Sir Jabez the clue he sought for. As yet he sought for it in

vain; with the gray brows drawn together over his nose, he surveyed her furtively, studying her face, her dress, the fingers that crumbled the bread at the side of her plate. With satisfaction she felt, rather than saw, that they rested for a moment on the wedding ring that adorned her third finger. That was a false trail that might haply lead him astray.

The silence was oppressive; she felt that the mask might slip from her face at any moment and betray her very real anxiety. To be recognized and proclaimed for what she was would upset all her plans and, for one thing, necessitate an immediate move from Pontresina. That was a serious consideration since she had engaged her room at the Hotel Engadine for a week at least and her expenditure on clothes in Paris had already made large inroads on her "fortune." If what was left of it was to last out the allotted time she could not

afford to pay for expensive rooms which she did not occupy. She cursed the crooked fate which had brought Sir Jabez Grinlay across her primrose path. Only Mr. Septimus Dobson could have been more unwelcome.

The waiter thrust a plate before her and she bent over it, presenting the top of her head to her neighbor's eyes. He had left off eating; the suspense was becoming intolerable. Suddenly he cleared his throat—how well she remembered the scraping sound—leaned forward and addressed her.

"I beg your pardon—hope I 'm not taking a liberty—but have n't we met before —somewhere?"

The puzzled uncertainty of the tone gave her courage; clearly he had not fixed her yet. Instinctively she felt that her cue was boldness; she jerked up her head with a fine affectation of surprise and then,

slowly and deliberately studied the baronet's features.

"I 'm afraid I don't remember," she said with an amused inclination of the head.

Sir Jabez reddened. Diana's tactics had been entirely successful. The suppressed smile, the touch of wondering astonishment had conveyed to him all that they were intended to convey—that he had made a false step and that his neighbor, entirely aware of her desirability as an acquaintance, looked upon his question as a ruse—as a clumsy manner of breaking the ice. His own faith in his capacity for remembering a face—he really had a remarkable talent in that line—failed him suddenly and he felt irritated with her, annoyed with himself, and more than a trifle ridiculous. He was sensible enough to see that the quickest way out of an embarrassing situation was by frank apology.

"I beg your pardon," he repeated, "I

must have been deceived by a resemblance to someone I've met before. I hope you'll forgive me—I see so many faces."

Diana's spirits bubbled up cheerfully. Instinctively she felt that her victory was complete and she began to see possibilities in this unexpected encounter with her former tyrant. There was a delicious irony in the contrast between their present and former meeting—between the baronet's humbled uneasy and apologetic tones and the curt, harsh manner and curt, harsh words in which he had informed her that he stood no dashed impudence from his employés and told her to clear out. Fancy Grinlay—Grinlay of the countless emporiums, Grinlay with forty thousand pounds a year at his back—cringing to one of his former assistants. Diana's voice shook with enjoyment.

"Oh, please don't apologize. There must be scores of people wandering about

the world cut to my pattern. I don't flatter myself nature took the trouble to invent a new design for my benefit. Would you mind passing the salt."

Sir Jabez passed it. Then, with a repetition of the familiar throat-scrape, he dived into his breast-pocket, produced a green morocco case, solemnly extracted a card and pushed it across the table.

"Perhaps, now you have accepted my apology, you will permit me to formally introduce myself," he said with a pomposity which was somewhat discounted by an habitual difficulty with his aspirates.

"Sir Jabez Grinlay," Diana read out. "*The* Sir Jabez Grinlay, I suppose."

"I am not aware of the existence of a namesake," the baronet returned.

"May I say that I am charmed to meet you, Sir Jabez?" Diana smiled. "I—well, at one time and another I have heard a great deal about you."

"Indeed? We have some mutual acquaintances, I suppose?"

"No, I don't think so; but everyone has heard of you—and seen your name on advertisements. Are you staying here long?"

"A month or two. My medical man ordered me rest and quiet—says I 've been overdoing it. I 'm not much of a man for holidays as a rule—it seems to me that if there 's one thing more tiring than another it 's what the doctors call rest and quiet. Are you thinking of making a stay here, Mrs. —?"

He paused, waiting for the blank to be filled in.

"Massingberd," Diana said boldly, though with a quick leap of the heart. If she had not already entered herself as Mrs. Massingberd in the hotel list, she would have given herself an alias, since there was the horrible possibility that the

name might touch a responsive chord in the memory of her late employer.

It did not. Sir Jabez Grinlay seldom forgot a face but with regard to names his memory was not so good—in fact, the facility with which they slipped his recollection was apt to annoy him. His expression did not change and Diana breathed again.

"I 'm thinking of staying for a week or two," she said. "It all depends on how I like the place, of course. Do you recommend it?"

Sir Jabez cleared his throat again and then, with slow deliberation he paid her a compliment.

"If my recommendation of Pontresina will induce you to stay on, Mrs. Massingberd," he said, "why I recommend it as strongly as possible."

Diana hastily swallowed a gulp of water. Sir Jabez Grinlay was trying to

make her a pretty speech—Sir Jabez Grinlay, whose parting recommendation had been "and don't you ever let me see your impudent face again, miss!" She grew pink with the effort to suppress her laughter. This unexpected revelation of the other soul-side of her former tyrant was almost more than her gravity could stand, the only way to preserve even a semblance of it was to effect an immediate change in the conversation.

"Do tell me," she said hurriedly, "who some of the people here are—I don't know a soul. That woman over there at the corner table—who is she? The one in the gray dress, I mean, with the young man sitting opposite—I suppose he 's her son?"

CHAPTER IV

SIR JABEZ looked over to the corner table. It was not entirely by chance that Diana had fixed upon its occupants for her first inquiry; when she entered the room she had been conscious of a piercing stare—of the kind that the starer would have characterized as "well-bred"—from the woman in the gray dress and of an equally prolonged but less critical survey from the china-blue eyes of her companion.

"That," said the baronet, "is Mrs. Cantelupe. She 's well-connected—thinks a lot of herself. The young fellow 's not her son—he 's her nephew, Captain Bretherton. An Honourable—the Honourable Victor Bretherton, fourth son of the late

Viscount Raynesworth and brother of the present peer. Used to be in the Welsh Guards but I hear he 's run through a pot of money and had to retire. I only met him when I came here, but I 've come across Mrs. Cantelupe once or twice in London."

"Indeed," Diana said, turning her head towards the window as she spoke—for, as if some instinct had warned him that he was the subject of discussion, the eyes of Captain the Honourable Victor Bretherton had suddenly taken her direction.

"Run through a pot of money, has he?" she went on lightly. "I feel quite drawn towards him—that 's just what I should like to do myself. I 'm a recklessly extravagant person, Sir Jabez."

Sir Jabez contemplated her gravely.

"That 's a pity," he commented.

"A pity—you ought to be delighted to hear it. The more extravagant people

there are in the world, the better for you. You surely don't imagine that you have built up your fortune by supplying people with nothing but the necessaries of life. You 've done it by tempting the money out of their pockets—by making them buy things they don't really want and would be much better without—in short, by inducing them to be extravagant. Where would you economical people be if it were n't for the spendthrifts? You 're not consistent—you don't practise what you preach. If you did, you 'd give up window-dressing and pull down your sky-signs—they 're only so many baits for the extravagant. You would also instruct your assistants to refrain from inquiring your customer's next pleasure."

"You 've got me there," Sir Jabez admitted. "But I was thinking of your own good, Mrs. Massingberd—not of mine. If I may say so, I was regarding you as a

friend—" he hesitated a little over the word—"not as a possible customer."

Again Diana had hasty recourse to the glass of water. Sir Jabez's attitude was appealing more and more to her sense of humor; he was evidently most desirous to be friendly but, at the same time, his advances were tinged with a shade of nervous anxiety. The nervous anxiety was the result of his experiences of the last few days; the new-made baronet's lack of enthusiasm for the attractions of Pontresina was not entirely due to an inborn indifference to the beauties of nature. In plain language he was "out of it" at the Hotel Engadine and far too shrewd not to recognize the fact. His London acquaintances acknowledged him, that was all; he was among them, but not of them. He could not talk golf, he could not talk climbing, he could not talk motors, he could not talk bridge; he could have con-

versed intelligently enough on business, but business men at the Hotel Engadine were conspicuous by their absence. His amusements hitherto had consisted in solitary constitutionals which he would have found much more tolerable if the neighborhood had been flatter. His human surroundings irritated him and he looked down on men of the Bretherton type just as much as he knew that men of the Bretherton type looked down on him. In short, he was thoroughly uncomfortable and homesick for his office; but it was characteristic of him that, having established himself at the Hotel Engadine, Pontresina, he had no intention of leaving it, merely because he found it disagreeable. For one thing, to himself if to nobody else, his departure would have seemed like a flight; and Sir Jabez Grinlay was not the man to turn his back on anyone.

All the same, his conversation with Diana Massingberd had come as a welcome break into the boredom of a dreary day. Her frank allusions to his trade and his wealth delighted him; with Mrs. Cantelupe and her class it was etiquette to ignore the existence of Grinlay's Emporiums Limited, except when Sir Jabez purposely gave an uncomfortable turn to the conversation by bluntly referring to them. It was no wonder that he was anxious to make a good impression—almost painfully so. He was not by any means a talkative man, but he had begun to miss the sound of his own voice lately. On that account only, he would have desired to know more of Diana.

And Diana, on her side, had every intention of improving the acquaintance. It was delightful to watch Sir Jabez's efforts to install himself in her good graces; instead of cursing the stars that had brought

him across her path, she discovered that she was deeply grateful to them. Henceforth Sir Jabez Grinlay was to be one of the elements in her enjoyments. She was glad, very glad, that she had come to Pontresina.

The baronet, finding his advances amiably encouraged, was in no hurry to leave the table; he lingered on while Mrs. Massingberd finished her luncheon. Diana made use of him to obtain information concerning her fellow guests and by the time she pushed back her chair and strolled onto the verandah she knew some score of them by name.

Sir Jabez hesitated for a moment as to whether or not he should follow her—and then decided not. He did not wish to appear to press his company upon Mrs. Massingberd; but in his own mind he decided upon a stratagem whereby his customary uninteresting constitutional should be

brightened by her presence. She had expressed the intention of resting for half an hour or so in the verandah and then setting out on a tour of exploration. If at the end of the allotted half-hour, he turned up ready for his walk, she would probably be glad to accept his offer to introduce her to the neighborhood.

Accordingly, some five and twenty minutes later, the baronet, hat on head and stick in hand, strolled round the corner of the verandah steps, peering through his glasses for Diana. But his neat ruse was doomed to failure. Her voice hailed him from behind, and, as he turned, she rose from beside one of the little round tables at which she had been seated, chatting to a man beside her.

"Are you looking for a chair, Sir Jabez?" she asked. "Take mine. I don't want it any more. I 'm just going to run upstairs and put on my hat. Captain

Bretherton has promised to show me the way up that mountain."

And with a nod and a smile she disappeared through the window. Sir Jabez, with a dissatisfied grunt, turned on his heel and tramped off on his prescribed sixty minutes' constitutional, leaving Bretherton to await Diana's return.

He did not have to await it long. She was down again in a moment, eager to be off. Bretherton had to quicken his steps to keep up with her as they scrambled along the stony, upward path. His own inclination was to a more leisurely contemplation of the beauties of nature, but all the same her frank animal spirits infected him and he found himself laughing and running along at her side like a boy.

"Give me a cigarette, won't you?" she said as they halted for a moment to look down and he placed one between his own lips.

"I beg your pardon," he returned, offering his case. "I did n't know you smoked."

"I don't," she said. "That 's to say I 've never been used to smoking and I don't think I really like it at all."

"Then why on earth—?" he laughed as he shielded a match for her between his fingers.

"Just to show I can if I like," she laughed back. "Not so very long ago I should n't have dared to be caught with a cigarette."

"What rot!" Bretherton commented—deciding in his own mind that the late Mr. Massingberd had been a tyrant of the first water. It is to be noted that in the course of their brief acquaintanceship he had already ascertained that Mr. Massingberd was "late."

Diana took two energetic puffs and then let the hand that held the cigarette drop

to her side. She caught her breath as she stood looking out over the valley.

"Don't you despise the Swiss?" she said, "I do."

"Despise the Swiss?" the guardsman echoed. "No—why? What 's the matter with 'em?"

"A sordid incapacity to know a good thing when they see it," Diana returned as she flung herself down on the slope and rubbed her fingers caressingly over the hot, scented turf.

"What the dickens do you mean?" Bretherton demanded.

Diana swept her hand comprehensively round the horizon.

"They are born to all this," she said, "this is their inheritance, and they leave it in shoals—to be waiters in London."

Captain Bretherton laughed cheerfully.

"Oh, there are worse places than London. You don't care for it, I suppose, but

I know I 'm always glad when I get back to it, and feel good old Pall Mall under my feet again."

She propped her chin upon her hand and looked down at him as he lay outstretched beside her, with his cap tilted over his eyes and a cigarette between his lips.

"Pall Mall," she said; "yes, that 's your London, of course—Pall Mall and Piccadilly and the Park, Regent Street and the theaters. But that was n't the London I was thinking of—I meant the other London—the one you don't know."

"The one I don't know!" Bretherton repeated.

Diana nodded. "Yes, the ugly London—the London with dirty streets and badly-dressed people, cheap drapers and public-houses and fried-fish shops and rows of common little squalid houses. There are more people in that sort of London than there are in yours, you know—and while

we are sitting here they are all stewing in it together."

"Poor devils," Captain Bretherton said sympathetically, "let 's hope they 're used to it. I suppose you 're interested in slummin' and that sort of thing?" he added as an after thought.

Diana sprang up suddenly.

"Yes, I am interested in that sort of thing," she said. "I've had good cause to be interested in it. But I don't want to think of it now; I want to think of other things. This is heaven and I hope my soul will come here when I die. Let 's get on—I want to go up ever so much higher."

And she scrambled on along the rocky path, her seriousness entirely gone, laughing and dashing along at a pace that impelled her companion to warn her of the danger of not attending to her foot-steps.

"These slopes are beastly dangerous," he explained. "They don't look it, but if

you once get off the track and begin sliding down a fairly steep one, there 'd be nothing to stop you till you are pitched into the stream at the bottom. With all these loose stones rollin' about on the path, you 'd better keep an eye on your feet."

"Thanks," Diana returned, "I can keep an eye on my feet any time. Just now I want to keep an eye on the view."

They went up almost to the snow-line; then, striking another path, they began to descend and, when they came upon a chalet, Bretherton proposed a halt for refreshment. They drank coffee and ate brownish bread and butter with great satisfaction; Diana had never enjoyed a meal more. She was hungry and thirsty with her exertions, the coffee was excellent, the sweep of the valley and the peaks beyond a perfect background to her bodily content; further, her companion interested and amused her. She liked listening to

his talk, even though—perhaps because—it aroused in her again the sensation of hearing an unfamiliar language. He preferred Switzerland in winter, he told her; he had been twice—once to Klosters, once to St. Moritz—to toboggan. He described the glories of the Cresta run as eloquently as his limited, unemotional English would permit; gave her, to the second, the time in which he himself had performed the run, compared it regretfully with the record. Diana, with her elbow on the table and her chin upon her palm, listened, nodding now and again, amused by her own reflections. How interested he seemed in what he was telling her, and what a child he was beside her—this good-natured young man with the china-blue eyes and the slow, hesitating manner of speech. He was a big boy who had not outgrown his playthings; all the things that to her were play to him were

earnest, the business of life. And of the real, earnest business of life—the need to work which is the need to eat, the fierce struggle to find a niche and a place and a foothold in the world—he knew nothing. He sat up above it all in the peace of the gods, troubled only when he missed his bird badly or made a poor stroke at golf. She led him on, mischievously, curiously, though not unkindly (she liked him too much to be unkind) to talk of his own concerns, including his recently closed career in the Welsh Guards. He did not need much encouragement; away up on the hillside, with the world to themselves, they had grown more intimate and confidential than they might have done in a month elsewhere.

As regards his retirement from the army, he was regretful—but philosophical. Of course he had been sorry to chuck the service; but a poor man had no business to

enter the service, so that was an end of it.

"Then what are you going to do in the future?" Diana asked.

Captain Bretherton shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't know yet—wait till something turns up, I suppose. My brother says he'll use his interest to get me an appointment as soon as there 's a decent one going. Meanwhile I 've got enough to muddle along with."

Diana smiled slowly as she looked across the valley at the shadows that were beginning to gather and blacken on the opposite heights. A few minutes before he had let slip the amount of his inadequate, younger son's income—six hundred a year. Enough to muddle along with. And she, with three hundred pounds as the sum total of her wealth! Her mouth twitched suddenly as she wondered whether Victor Bretherton's money had ever

purchased him anything so well worth having as the routing of Septimus Dobson. She thought not.

Following her eyes, he too noticed the deepening shadows and drew out his watch.

"About time we were gettin' on, eh? I 'm not over sure about the way back and I 've promised to turn up at the theatricals to-night, so we must n't be late for dinner. You 're coming, I suppose?"

"I don't know—I have n't heard anything about them."

"Oh, you 'd better come. Jimmy Tollemache is getting them up. He 's rigged up a stage in the music-room and he and Mrs. Monck and Lady Catherine Fisher and a lot of others have been rehearsing away for a week. I hear they 're all jolly bad, but we may as well go and have a look at 'em—there 's nothing else on to-night."

They plunged downwards into the cool gray between the mountains while the peaks above them glowed and grew wonderful. Diana was hushed into silence; Bretherton talked indifferently or puffed at a cigarette. His obvious little remarks about things that did not matter in the least had the effect of irritating her at times—yet on the whole she was glad to have had him with her. He was kindly, good-natured, companionable—ridiculous of course from her point of view, but that was not his own fault but the fault of his narrow breeding.

As she dressed for dinner that night she found herself wondering what he would think of her gown—a "creation" from the Rue de la Paix which as yet no eyes but her own and the dressmaker's had admired. The long glass in her bedroom told her she had nothing to fear; and, as the distant strains of a string band

reached her from the dining-room, she stood for a minute swaying lightly before her reflection, exuberantly happy. Then she ran downstairs.

CHAPTER V

MRS. CANTELUPE was not happy. Her usually smooth brow—she was a wonderfully well-preserved woman—was furrowed into at least three lines. She was thinking deeply over the events of the last few days; she was wondering what the next few days would bring forth. She was in deep perplexity and had no one to consult.

The cause alike of her meditations and her perplexity was Diana Massingberd—now for five days an inmate of the Hotel Engadine.

From Mrs. Cantelupe's point of view the history of these five days had been as follows:

Day one. Within an hour of her ar-

rival at the Hotel Engadine Captain the Honourable Victor Bretherton had introduced himself—in what manner unascertained—to Mrs. Massingberd. During the afternoon he had accompanied her for a walk; during the evening's theatrical performance he had occupied the seat next to her own.

Day two. Mrs. Massingberd, on a donkey, had ridden off with the Carews' picnic-party—Captain Bretherton, on another donkey beside her. Though on this particular point no direct evidence was forthcoming, Mrs. Cantelupe felt justified in concluding that it was at Captain Bretherton's instigation that Mrs. Carew had extended an invitation to Mrs. Massingberd—since the Carews had had no previous acquaintance with the new arrival.

Day three. With regard to the earlier part of the day, no particulars obtainable.

In the evening, a dance being held at the Hotel Victoria, Captain Bretherton, according to the evidence of reliable witnesses, waltzed twice with Mrs. Massingberd, sat out another dance with her and took her in to supper. This item of the day's proceedings was the more significant since Captain Bretherton was not a dancing man.

Day four. Inquiries revealed the fact that Mrs. Massingberd had been escorted by Captain Bretherton to the links at Samaden, with the object of teaching her golf. In the evening Captain Bretherton joined a party on the verandah—of which Mrs. Massingberd was the center of attraction.

Day five. The golfing lessons having been discontinued owing to Mrs. Massingberd's distaste for the game, she and Captain Bretherton had departed after lunch on a pedestrian expedition to the Morte-

ratsch Glacier, returning only just in time for dinner.

Under these circumstances it was no wonder that the question uppermost in the mind of Mrs. Cantelupe was "Who is Mrs. Massingberd?"

She had put the question, with increasing earnestness, to several of her acquaintances during the last day or two; but in no case had the answer been satisfactory. Beyond the fact that on one particular Wednesday afternoon Mrs. Massingberd had descended upon the Hotel Engadine from the outer world, nobody knew anything about her. Jimmy Tollemache, who was supposed to know everyone, when pressed on the subject could only opine that she was a very charming little woman.

"Oh, of course she's charming," Mrs. Cantelupe had returned pettishly, "but

that 's not what I mean. Who *is* she?"

Jimmy could only advise that the question should be referred to Mrs. Massingberd herself.

"Or why don't you get Victor to pump her," he suggested mischievously. "He 's always about with the fair Diana—did you know that was her name, by the by? Suits her, does n't it?—I dare say she would n't object to confiding her family tree to him—if she 's got one, that 's to say."

Mrs. Cantelupe's anxiety was excusable; and it was growing unbearable. She had not the faintest doubt that her nephew was on the verge of falling in love—if he had not already fallen in love—with Diana Massingberd; her unhappy state of mind was due to an unavoidable uncertainty as to whether the growing attachment should be stifled or encouraged.

At present she dared not make a move

in either direction. She was bound hand and foot until she had obtained an answer to that persistent "Who is Mrs. Massingberd?" The question meant, in this instance, not so much what were Mrs. Massingberd's qualifications with regard to birth and gentility, as what were her resources, and would they be equal to the strain of supporting Captain the Honourable Victor Bretherton?

By bitter experience Mrs. Cantelupe knew what that strain was. During four complaining years—ever since Lord Raynesworth had repudiated any further responsibility for his younger brother's debts—she had paid her favorite nephew's bills with machine-like regularity. The process had only come to an end a few weeks before when, urged on to action by her bankers and her solicitor, she had met a further demand from her graceless relative by laying before his eyes the sum total

of his expenditure during the last four years, refusing to allow him a penny in the future and making his immediate retirement from the Guards a condition of a final settling up. Greatly to her relief—for she had a real tenderness for Victor in her childless, elderly heart—the culprit accepted the situation with his customary good-temper; explained that he really had n't had the least idea he'd spent all that money; and, admitting the impossibility of continuing in his present way of life on his own inadequate resources, made no difficulty at all about sending in his papers.

It was no wonder that, with that experience behind her, Mrs. Cantelupe felt that Victor Bretherton, of all men, had need to be careful in taking unto himself a wife. Whatever other qualifications that wife possessed, one she must have—money. Not only money enough for her own needs

but money for her husband's—for Mrs. Cantelupe was not sanguine enough to suppose that, by the mere fact of removing him from an expensive regiment, she had overcome her nephew's constitutional inability to live within his income. In her own mind and after careful calculation, she had decided that the woman Victor married must be possessed of a clear two thousand a year at the very least. In the past she had more than once attempted to settle her nephew comfortably in life by securing for him a wife with the necessary financial qualifications; but, so far, not the slightest success had attended her efforts.

To begin with, Victor Bretherton was not at all susceptible—which rendered his present speedy subjugation by Diana Massingberd the more remarkable.

To Mrs. Massingberd, personally, the careful aunt had no objection. She was smart, well-dressed, attractive—decidedly

so. If she possessed the necessary income, she was eminently desirable; were her doubts on that particular once removed, Mrs. Cantelupe would welcome her with open arms. To all appearances, she was well-off; but it did not do to trust entirely to outward appearances and fashionable hotels were notoriously the hunting-ground of the woman in search of a husband. Hopelessly ineligible as he was in other respects, Victor Bretherton was the son of a peer; it was quite possible that his courtesy title might be an attraction in Mrs. Massingberd's eyes.

Mrs. Cantelupe sighed—almost groaned—and dropped her tatting onto her knees. If Mrs. Massingberd should prove ineligible, immediate action was necessary; without loss of time Victor must be swept, transported, whirled away from the influence of his charmer. Yet it would be madness to take such a step without full

knowledge of the facts; by precipitate and unreasonable flight she might ruin her nephew's chances for life, not to mention her own chances of enjoying an income unhampered by his constant calls upon it. No wonder Mrs. Cantelupe groaned; her uncertainty was pitiable.

In desperation at the ill success of her inquiries, she had finally resolved to tackle Mrs. Massingberd herself—to get hold of her and fish, dive and dig for the truth. Half an hour's private conversation, she told herself, could not fail to provide her with a clue; even if Mrs. Massingberd were suspicious and uncommunicative, something would crop up—for instance the name of a mutual acquaintance of whom inquiries might be made.

The difficulty, hitherto, had been to obtain half an hour's uninterrupted conversation with a person restlessly energetic and so much in demand as Diana Mas-

singberd. During the last two days Mrs. Cantelupe had manœuvred in vain towards the end she desired—Diana was either not to be found, or found surrounded by half a dozen people. But, with irritated patience, Mrs. Cantelupe had bided her time and, finally, fate had been kind to her. She had been half-way through her dinner that night when Victor hurried in—back late from the Morteratsch Glacier expedition. Five minutes later Diana had put in an appearance, radiant in pink.

As she made for the door, leaving her nephew to work his way through the menu, Mrs. Cantelupe paused beside Diana's table.

"If you've nothing else to do, Mrs. Massingberd," she smiled, "won't you come and have your coffee with us to-night? In my sitting-room—you know which it is, don't you? Number eleven

on the ground floor. That 's right—so glad you can come. Do n't hurry over your dinner—I sha' n't order coffee just yet."

So far, so good. Mrs. Massingberd was coming—but then so was her nephew. Nor was he likely to find attraction elsewhere while Mrs. Massingberd occupied his aunt's sitting-room. If only she could get rid of him—it would be possible to give the conversation the femininely confidential turn for which she hoped while Victor was not about. She sighed again—and then rose quickly as a waiter flung open the door and announced—

"Mrs. Whyte-Fraser."

With her wrist lifted to the correct angle for the coming hand-shake and a cloak flung over her dinner-dress—she had walked over from the Hotel Victoria —Mrs. Whyte-Fraser sailed into the room. Mrs. Cantelupe's heart leaped;

Providence had been kind to her at last. She desired no better ally than Eleanor Whyte-Fraser. Eleanor was a connection of the Cantelupes, a woman to whom the position could be safely explained, a woman whose assistance could safely be asked.

Mrs. Cantelupe was not long in asking it. She only gave Eleanor Whyte-Fraser a short two minutes to expatiate in her languid, high-pitched voice on the discomforts of the journey from London to Pontresina, and then she plunged straight into the middle of the subject and laid bare her perplexity.

"You see how it is, Eleanor. What am I to do? I must—I literally must—find out something about her before I let Victor entangle himself hopelessly. You can see that—the idea of him, with barely six hundred a year, marrying a woman who was not well off—madness!"

Mrs. Whyte-Fraser agreed.

"I knew you 'd say so. I assure you I 'm at my wit's end. I 've made inquiries right and left among the people here. Not a soul knows anything about her—not a soul."

Mrs. Whyte-Fraser pondered.

"Massingberd—Massingberd. I suppose she is n't any connection of Mrs. Jimmy Sinclair's? She was a Massingberd, you know, before she was married."

"I have n't the least idea. All I know about her is that she once had a husband—she does n't seem to have mentioned any of her people, except him."

"And what has she told you about the husband?" Eleanor inquired.

"She has n't told me anything at all about him. For one thing, I have never asked her anything about him—I have n't had the chance. I have only spoken to her three or four times. I understand—

from Victor—that they were only married for a short time and that Mr. Massingberd was a good deal older than herself."

"That sounds hopeful," Mrs. Whyte-Fraser suggested. "An elderly husband usually means money."

"Yes, I know—but my dear Eleanor, one has to be so careful in these foreign hotels. Victor's whole future may be at stake. Something must be done immediately—immediately. At present I dare say I could get him away from her if it turned out to be necessary; but if things are let to take their course for a few days more . . . I assure you, Eleanor, he is with her from morning till night. She really is an attractive-looking woman—has a distinct style of her own and knows how to put her clothes on. If only she is all that she seems to be, as regards money, it would be the best thing that could possibly happen to Victor; a sensible mar-

riage of the kind is what I 've always been hoping for him."

"Of course," Mrs. Whyte-Fraser murmured. Her point of view was Mrs. Cantelupe's exactly. "It would be dreadful for you if he did anything foolish—married a woman he could n't support—"

"I should wash my hands of him if he did," Mrs. Cantelupe said desperately, appalled by the prospect. "Fond as I am of him, Eleanor, I should wash my hands of him altogether. But I do n't think—I really do n't think—he could be quite so idiotic. He knows perfectly well that there is not a penny coming to him from anyone—not a penny. I can't leave him anything, you know—I only have a life interest and the principal is settled on the Frederick Cantelupes. Still, men do behave like lunatics over love affairs sometimes—and that is exactly why I feel I

must get to the bottom of this business at once. And there is only one way to do it —by tackling Mrs. Massingberd herself."

Eleanor nodded approvingly.

"Good. If she has nothing to hide she 'll be quite willing to talk—and you 're the right person to make her talk. When are you going to try?"

"Now—directly. I 've asked her to come in here as soon as she has finished her dinner—for coffee. She may be here at any moment. Eleanor, I 'm relying on your good-nature to help me?"

"On my good-nature?"

"Yes—to get Victor out of the way. He 'll be here too—and I want to get rid of him. It 's an abominably rude thing to ask you, of course, but will you, as soon as you have swallowed your coffee, drag him off with you to the Victoria—and keep him there as long as you can? Say Major Whyte-Fraser is dying to see him

—say anything you like—only manage to get him out of the way while I have a quarter of an hour alone with Mrs. Massingberd."

"Agreed," Mrs. Whyte-Fraser laughed.

CHAPTER VI

DIANA did not go straight from the dining-room to Number Eleven on the ground floor. For a few minutes she wanted to be alone, that she might think. So she ran upstairs to her bedroom, switched on the light and sat down by the dressing-table.

She rested her elbow on the table and stared gravely into the glass—holding commune with herself. Her eyes looked into their own reflection, steadily and with hardly a flicker. She was asking herself what she was going to do—what was to be her future attitude towards Captain Victor Bretherton.

She spoke aloud to her own reflection.

"I have only known him for five days,"

she said slowly, "but I think—though, of course, I may be entirely mistaken—that he is beginning to get rather fond of me."

That was the position; she had to consider it. It was necessary to consider it at once, for the next move lay with her. Of course, as she had said, there was the possibility that she was wrong in her estimate of the ex-guardsman's feelings; as an admirer Bretherton was singularly unemotional, and she could not recall any definite speech or action by which he had at all committed himself. But he liked to be with her; he liked to be alone with her; he had been almost sulky the day before when Sir Jabez Grinlay had tacked himself onto them and strolled back to the hotel in their company. He was always on the lookout for her, when possible he was always at her side—and the good-natured readiness with which others resigned her companionship when he was

present showed that his preference had not been marked by her eyes alone.

Admitting, then, that she had tangible grounds for believing that Bretherton cared for her, what was she to do? Was it fair to him to stop on in Pontresina and meet him day by day? Would it not be more kindly, more honest, to break off their acquaintanceship at once? In two days' time the week for which she had taken her room at the Hotel Engadine would be up. She had only to tell the landlord that she did not intend to stay on—and vanish out of Victor's ken.

If she had continued her conversation with the looking-glass and spoken her thoughts on the subject aloud, they would have run something after this fashion:

"There is no reason why I should go. I came here to enjoy myself—and I am enjoying myself; I 've made lots of friends

and I 'm having the time of my life. How do I know whether I shall have such a good time anywhere else? Why should I allow him to spoil my pleasure?

"I have had so little pleasure in my life that surely I have a right to take it where I can get it and however I like, without worrying about other people. If they get hurt, it is not my fault; nobody has ever minded when they hurt me. All the same, I do n't want to hurt him if I can help it. There is something about him that I like. He is n't a bit clever, he reminds me of a great, big child, with his head full of nothing but golf and seven-course dinners. I do n't think he ever troubles much about anything else—except me. Still, I like him. I know that if he found out about Dobson's and Grinlay's he would never look at me again; but that is n't altogether his fault. I should be

like that, I suppose, if I had had Lord Raynesworth for a father and Mrs. Cantelupe for an aunt.

"If I stop on in Pontresina and if he really cares, I shall have to refuse him. . . ."

At that point her meditations halted. Her eyes fell from their reflection to the toilet-cover; and remained there till the striking of a clock in the corridor roused her suddenly in remembrance of the fact that Mrs. Cantelupe was expecting her for coffee in Number Eleven. She sprang up and patted her hair hastily before the glass. Her face was a little paler than it had been when she came upstairs—but her mind was quite made up. The next day she would tell Herr Ritter that she was moving on; it would be kinder.

She ran quickly downstairs and opened the door of Number Eleven with an apology for her lateness. Mrs. Cantelupe and

her nephew were not alone; in the middle of the room Mrs. Whyte-Fraser lounged in an arm-chair and Sir Jabez Grinlay rose from the obscurity near the window. He had strolled in, unasked, from the verandah and—perhaps, because he heard that Mrs. Massingberd was coming—had stayed. From Mrs. Cantelupe's point of view, his presence was regrettable.

While her nephew rang for coffee, Mrs. Cantelupe effected the introductions.

"Mrs. Massingberd, Mrs. Whyte-Fraser. Do take a more comfortable chair, Mrs. Massingberd—I am sure you must be dreadfully tired."

"Me?" Diana queried. "Oh, dear. no —why should I be tired?"

"My nephew has just been telling me that you and he went for some tremendous expedition this afternoon—to the Morteratsch Glacier, was n't it?"

Diana laughed. For the first time

since she had come to Pontresina she felt the need of laughter and much talking, and knew that her spirits would flag without them. It was as if a breath from the outer world—the cold world, the real world—had found its way into her pleasant hothouse. She spoke fast and glibly.

"Oh, yes, we walked to the Morteratsch Glacier; but I should hardly call that a tremendous expedition. I don't suppose it 's more than six miles there and back, do you, Captain Bretherton? Six miles—I don't think anything of that."

"You 're a great walker then, Mrs. Massingberd?" Sir Jabez suggested.

Diana looked at him with sudden mischief.

"I don't know that I should describe myself as a great walker, Sir Jabez; but I 'm used to being on my feet all day."

She had long lost all fear of recognition on his part, and, more than once, she had

ventured on similar speeches in his presence, enjoying his utter failure to grasp her veiled allusions to the life behind the counter. The only remark her own called forth in this instance was from Mrs. Whyte-Fraser, who, as the waiter entered with the coffee, roused herself from the contemplation of Mrs. Massingberd's hand-made embroideries to say languidly—

"Dear me—how delightfully strong you must be. The one thing I cannot do is to stand about."

She slipped her arms out of her cloak and, at Mrs. Cantelupe's request, began to pour out the coffee; their hostess, asking to be excused, had retired to the neighborhood of the lamp with a handful of letters which the waiter had brought in on the tray. Captain Bretherton handed the cups round, remarking, as he did so, that coffee was the only thing in

the way of refreshment that the hotel cook knew how to turn out.

"Otherwise the cookin 's simply beastly," he grumbled. "That soup to-night was a disgrace—mysterious brown lumps floatin' about in a plateful of warm grease. A revoltin' concoction, I called it. Did n't you think so, Mrs. Massingberd?"

If there was one thing about Bretherton that irritated Diana more than another it was his constant insistence on the immense importance of his food. She had all a woman's natural indifference to her meals; further, after a long course of tough meat, weak tea and "bread and scrape," it was hardly likely that she would have any serious fault to find with the fare provided at the Hotel Engadine. She had little sympathy with Victor's repeated complaints on the subject; and, more than once, she had felt that, if her admirer had liked his dinner a little less,

she could have liked him a good deal more.

"The soup," she said indifferently. "Was it so nasty as all that? Do you know I really did n't notice."

Captain Bretherton looked at her in genuine astonishment. Women, he knew, were extraordinarily lacking in discrimination where meals were concerned; but even a woman could hardly have failed to resent the outrage upon British palates which had that night been placed before them in the guise of soup.

"You surely do n't mean to say that you swallowed the stuff?" he asked incredulously.

Diana reflected and then nodded. "I suppose I must have done so. Yes, I remember I did, and that I not only swallowed it, but thoroughly enjoyed it—in the first place, because I was exceedingly hungry and, in the second place, because I came here to enjoy everything, even that

revolting soup, and when I set out to enjoy myself, I don't allow soup or anything else to be the fly in my ointment. If the fly gets in without asking my permission, I simply pretend he isn't there."

Her spirits were climbing up again rapidly. Her own quick flow of talk, the neighborhood of Bretherton's smiling blue eyes, Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's critically approving survey of her trailing gown and the softened beat of a Strauss waltz that someone was playing in the music-room —all had an effect upon her, and she felt a different woman from the Diana who had conversed with her reflected image a little time before. For the time being she had forgotten the real world; she was back in the hothouse—the place where sheltered men and women played at life and living.

"Sounds as if you were a what-d'-you-

call-it—Christian Scientist," Bretherton commented.

Diana shook her head. "Oh, no, I 'm afraid I 'm much too material to be a Christian Scientist. I like the good things of life—when I can get them—and plenty of them. And I hate the bad things of life, when they are really bad—you 'd be surprised to know how much I hate them. But just at present I 'm having a good time—a real good time—and I refuse to allow any little disagreeables to interfere with it."

"That 's what I call taking an 'oliday in the right spirit," Sir Jabez said approvingly, while Mrs. Whyte-Fraser shivered at the dropped "h." "That 's getting your money's worth, Mrs. Massingberd. I only wish Switzerland was as much to my taste as it is to yours."

"That 's what I came here for, Sir Ja-

bez," Diana nodded, "to get my money's worth—and I 'm getting it."

An exclamation from Mrs. Cantelupe turned their heads in her direction. She was on her feet with a sheaf of closely written pages in her hand and irritation in her face.

"What 's the matter, Aunt Emma?" Victor inquired. "Anything wrong?"

There was. Something very wrong. Waving the sheaf about, Mrs. Cantelupe explained excitedly. Her sister-in-law had written in despair—a fearful blow had befallen her. Her best-looking daughter had engaged herself to a hopeless ineligible; remonstrances were of no avail—she and the ineligible expressed the intention of getting married without delay.

"And what Milly can possibly see in him I can 't think," Mrs. Cautelupe moaned. "You remember him, Eleanor—he was

staying at the Shafto's when we were there, last September? The fair little man with no eyebrows and projecting teeth? It 's really too dreadful—and Adelaide says he literally has n't a penny. What they 're going to live upon, heaven only knows! If there was anything attractive about him one could understand it—but an insignificant-looking little creature like that!"

Mrs. Whyte-Fraser was duly sympathetic; Diana wondered what was the exact translation into the pounds, shillings and pence of plain English and arithmetic of the hopeless phrase "he literally has n't a penny."

Mrs. Cantelupe gathered up the sheaf and glanced at the clock.

"It 's too late for the post to-night, but I must just scribble Adelaide a line—it will go out first thing in the morning. She does n't know I 'm here and her letter has

been following me about—she 'll think me *so* unsympathetic and unfeeling. You will forgive me, Mrs. Massingberd, won't you—and you won't run away till I come back. I shall only be a very few minutes. Poor Adelaide—I really can't bear to think of her feelings, Eleanor. The only good-looking one of all that flock of girls!"

And Mrs. Cantelupe swept out of the room, overflowing with sympathy for Adelaide's shattered hopes.

As the door closed behind her and the atmosphere settled down into its former calm, Mrs. Whyte-Fraser picked up the broken thread of the conversation by addressing herself to Diana.

"You like Pontresina, Mrs. Massingberd?"

Diana nodded emphatically over her cup.

"Like it! That's a very mild way of

expressing it. I delight in the place. It 's a new sensation to me."

"A new sensation?" Mrs. Whyte-Fraser repeated.

"Yes—the mountains, the air, everything. You see, I have never been in Switzerland before and, until the other day, I had never seen a mountain with snow on it, except in a picture. I have n't got over the thrill yet."

Captain Bretherton laughed in the tone of a man to whom the incomprehensible has suddenly been made clear.

"Oh, now I understand," he said, "why it is that you 're so keen on all these waterfalls and glaciers and things round here."

"Which means, I suppose," Diana returned, "that, as far as you are concerned, you have reached the blasé stage and are not keen on waterfalls and glaciers and things any longer."

Captain Bretherton assented, with reservations.

"Of course they 're very fine—and magnificent—and all that," he said vaguely. "But you 'll find, when once you 've got used to 'em, that one mountain 's awfully like another mountain, especially when they 've both got snow on top. I 've come to the conclusion that there 's a strong family likeness about Alps—I can hardly tell which of 'em I 'm looking at myself."

"I wish you 'd told me that before," Diana said reproachfully.

"Why?"

"Because for the last two or three days I 've been relentlessly dragging you about in different directions to look at what you probably imagined was the same monotonous mountain with the same identical snow on the top. I really ought to apologize."

Captain Bretherton protested.

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Massingberd, you know I did n't mean that. I 've enjoyed the walks awfully—even though I 'm not so great on Alpine scenery as you are. It 's tremendously good of you to let me go with you."

Diana shook her head obstinately.

"It 's very kind and polite of you to say so, of course; but, after the confession of boredom you have just made, I shall never dare to ask you to come with me again. I shall have to look out for some simple and unsophisticated Cook's tourist to keep me company—and share my enthusiasms and illusions."

"The sort of cheerful bounder that takes his five guinea's worth of lovely Lucerne, eh?" Bretherton suggested. "Suit you down to the ground."

"Do you know," Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's high-pitched voice chimed in, "I always wonder who those extraordinary people

can be, and what they do at other times, when they are not taking five guinea's worth of lovely Lucerne."

She paused, shot an almost imperceptible glance over her shoulder at Sir Jabez Grinlay's stolid, expressionless face and went on—

"Tom says he believes that for the remaining fifty-one weeks of the year they are occupied in handing stockings or sausages over a counter."

"Very likely," Sir Jabez said curtly—his face still stolid and expressionless. It was Diana who flushed a little as she turned her head swiftly. Again the gulf had opened; the gulf, sometimes concealed but always there, fixed, fixed immutably between the toiler and the pleasant idler who despised his toil—and, despising it, yet lived on it. Almost before she realized what she was doing, she was defending her own class.

"Quite likely," she said. "You see, that sort of person is usually in the unfortunate position of having its living to earn."

Her sarcasm was entirely lost on Mrs. Whyte-Fraser.

"I have n't a doubt of it," she agreed amiably. "But then need that make the poor things so aggressively unornamental?"

The light, contemptuous, laughing phrase conjured up, in a flash, a picture to Diana's eyes—or rather two. The first, herself as she had looked a month ago in the dormitory glass at Dobson's—heavy-eyed and pallid, with sullen, white lips drawn down at the corners. The second, the reflection at which she had glanced before she descended to the dining-room that night—a confident, smiling face with warm cheeks and lips and below it the curves and swathed lines of a frock from the Rue de la Paix. Her eyes grew

brighter and wider as she leaned towards Mrs. Whyte-Fraser.

"Do you know," she said, "I am rather inclined to think that there are difficulties —almost insuperable difficulties—in the way of being useful and ornamental at the same time. Strictly speaking, we of the ornamental classes are not useful; and the useful class—the class that earns its own living and other people's dividends—is seldom decorative."

Mrs. Whyte-Fraser smiled vaguely. Diana's economics left her withers quite unwrung. Dividends, to her, were the automatic result of invested capital. You put so much money into a good thing and you got five per cent. How you got it might be known to people "in the City"; it was not known to her. She seized on the part of Diana's speech that she had understood.

"Well, it 's to be hoped, then, that the

five-guinea tourist is only half as useful as he looks. If your theory is correct, his value to the community must be enormous. There were dozens of him—and her—in the train yesterday and I must say, greatly as I dislike the species, I really pitied them. Nearly all of them staggered ashore at Boulogne palpably and unbecomingly the worse for the crossing—it was simply atrocious—and they were forthwith stowed away like sardines into second-class carriages with the prospect of a night of unmitigated misery before them. I wondered what on earth induced them to spend their money on undergoing that torture?"

Sir Jabez cleared his throat disapprovingly.

"Some form of temporary insanity, I should say. They 'd much better have kept their savings in their pockets and stopped at 'ome."

Diana flashed round on her new opponent.

"I don't agree with you—not in the very least. And I know what the inducement was, Mrs. Whyte-Fraser. It was the prospect of a new sensation—of romance."

"Romance?" Sir Jabez echoed. If the word had been uttered by anyone but Diana Massingberd, he would have echoed it contemptuously.

"Yes, romance—romance," she repeated, emphasizing the word with her hand on the arm of her chair. "Something that their everyday life fails to give them."

Captain Bretherton joined in—cheerful and unimaginative.

"And a jolly good thing too, I should say. You wouldn't like to spend your everyday life sitting five a side in a railway carriage, would you?"

Diana's shoulders rose imperceptibly at

the smiling question. How wide, how very wide, the gulf was.

"No," she said impatiently, "of course I should n't—and no more would the five-guinea tourists. But I can quite imagine —can 't you?— that there are times when even a night in a stuffy railway carriage would come as a welcome change to some people—to people whose lives have gone by, day after day and month after month, in the same dull, mean, little round, without any hope of change or betterment or excitement—"

She broke off suddenly, warned by the quick throb in her own voice. Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's face betrayed curiosity; Bretherton had taken the cigarette from his mouth and was holding it, meditatively, between his fingers. She looked round and laughed.

"I 'm afraid you do n't quite share my sympathy for the globe-trotting counter-

jumper and his fellows. You may think me a truly extraordinary person, but I really like to think that when he does have a chance of getting away from his daily round and common task, he thoroughly enjoys himself, in his own vulgar fashion."

Captain Bretherton restored the cigarette to his lips and agreed cordially.

"Of course. Why should n't he enjoy himself, poor beggar. So long as he does n't spoil the place for other people and get in the way—"

He halted to send a smoke ring to the ceiling and Diana completed the sentence.

"Of the ornamental classes. I quite agree with you—the two do n't mix. Their views of life are so hopelessly dissimilar."

She felt Bretherton's eyes seek her face curiously as if something in her tone had

struck him; but at that moment Mrs. Whyte-Fraser created a diversion.

"Is that really the time?" she exclaimed pointing to the clock on the mantelpiece. "I had n't the least idea it was so late. Tom will be wondering whether I am lost and sending out guides and St. Bernard dogs to look for me. Captain Bretherton, whether you like it or not, I am going to drag you back to the Victoria with me."

Captain Bretherton's countenance belied his "Oh—er—delighted," but Mrs. Whyte-Fraser was true to her pledge.

"To see Tom," she explained. "I do n't know what it is he wants to talk to you about, but he told me I was to be sure and capture you if I ran across you; so I must absolutely insist on carrying you off with me now."

She nodded to Sir Jabez, extended a bent wrist to Mrs. Massingberd and the next instant had swept through the open window with her captive in her train.

CHAPTER VII

AS Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's high soprano chatter died away down the path, Sir Jabez Grinlay emerged from the shadow by the window with his customary scrapy cough. During the last few days his opportunities of intercourse with Mrs. Massingberd had been fewer than he could have desired; he had, therefore, no intention of letting the present one slip.

"Should you care for a little turn, Mrs. Massingberd?" he inquired, waving his hand suggestively in the direction of the landscape. "It 's a lovely night."

"No, thanks," Diana answered absently —she was not thinking of him at that moment. Then, feeling that she had been curt, she explained her refusal.

"I should have enjoyed a turn—but Mrs. Cantelupe particularly asked me to wait till she came back."

Sir Jabez hesitated. Diana had begun to turn over the leaves of an illustrated paper; he was not quite sure that she did not expect him to go. He made a step towards the window and then halted.

"Should you have any objection to my keeping you company till then?"

The question amused her. She pushed aside the paper and looked up at him.

"Of course not. Do you know, Sir Jabez, you interest me very much?"

"I 'm very glad to 'ear it," the baronet returned—not without a certain caution in face and voice. He had already noted in Diana a capacity for disconcerting remarks and he was not at all sure that one of them was not now on the way. "May I ask why?"

"Yes, you may ask and I'll tell you,"

Diana nodded, "though perhaps you won't be flattered when you know the reason. You interest me because, whenever I talk to you, whenever I look at you, I can't help thinking of all the men and women whom you control and order—I mean the people who work for you."

"My employés?" Sir Jabez said with a tinge of surprise.

"Yes, your employés," Diana repeated. "That's what they are to you, is n't it—just your employés?"

It was in his mind to ask her what else they should be; but she did not give him time to put the question. Throwing back her head, she looked straight up into his face.

"What a different person—what an utterly and entirely different person—you must seem to them from what you seem to me."

Sir Jabez saw no cause to dissent from

the proposition. He smiled, a little grimly, as he supposed he did.

"Of course you do," Diana said decidedly. "To me you seem quite a nice and amiable individual; but I do n't suppose there 's a single creature in your employment—man or woman—who ever has a good word to say for you behind your back."

Half prepared as he had been for a thrust, Sir Jabez's breath was taken away. Had the attack been delivered with venom, he would have been angry; but Diana's upturned face was frank, smiling and unconscious of offence.

"Upon my word—" he gasped out.

Diana's smile grew even franker.

"But it 's true, is n't it?" she persisted, expostulating with his surprise. "You 're much too clever not to know that you 're unpopular with your workpeople."

Sir Jabez gathered himself together.

"Oh, of course I know it," he confessed with a rather sour smile, "but—I was wondering how you did."

The question was astonished, not suspicious; still, Diana felt it behooved her to be careful. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Feminine intuition, I suppose—I can feel it in my bones. You are a bit of a tyrant, now, aren't you? You like to think that people are afraid of you?"

"Yes," the baronet admitted readily. "That 's to say I like people who work for me to be afraid of me. It keeps 'em up to the mark—and it 's the business of an employer to keep 'is 'ands up to the mark."

Diana glanced up sharply at his grave, matter-of-fact face. There was nothing unkindly in it, only much that was hard; and, as she looked, it began to dawn upon her dimly that Sir Jabez Grinlay was as much the product and result of system as she herself had been a month ago. He

was the upper millstone—she the nether. That was all. Each ground its life out in obedience to laws which economists held sacred under the name of Supply and Demand.

"Fancy spending all one's existence in keeping other people's noses to the grindstone," she said lightly. "How I should hate it!"

Sir Jabez surveyed her thoughtfully. He was conscious of a very strong desire to stand well with Mrs. Massingberd and he began to regret his frank admission that he knew of his own unpopularity. She was evidently under the impression that he was a harsh employer—an impression that he honestly believed to be unjust. He endeavored to remove it.

"You seem to have got an idea into your 'ead that I 'm a regular ogre to my employés; but I assure you that 's not the case. My 'ands are no worse off than

they would be anywhere else. You can see that for yourself, if you care to have a look round one of our establishments next time you're in London. We aren't afraid of inspection, government or otherwise. You'll find everything open and above-board—it doesn't do to play tricks with the Factory Acts nowadays. If you're interested in that sort of thing, come along and 'ave a look at us. It'll be a new experience for you, anyway—" and he laughed and rubbed his hands together—"for I don't suppose you've ever set foot in one of my establishments in your life. They're not quite your style, eh?" and his eyes swept approvingly down the lines of the pink gown.

"Now there you're wrong," Diana said deliberately. "Not so very long ago I used to know one of your establishments very well indeed—the one in Clapham."

It was risky, she knew; but the situa-

tion appealed to her sense of humor and she could not help it.

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes. That was in my hard-up days—you may be surprised to hear it, but I was hard-up once, and not so very long ago. Well, in those hard-up days, I used to—I can almost say I used to frequent your Clapham establishment. I remember it quite well—especially the mantle department."

Again Sir Jabez surveyed the pink gown—and smiled at his own expense.

"You 've given up dealing with us now, I suppose?"

"I 'm afraid I have," Diana admitted.

"Do n't blame you," the baronet nodded. "I sha'n't press you to continue your esteemed patronage. I don't mind confessing that Jabez Grinlay, Limited, could n't turn you out as you 're turned out tonight."

Diana ran her hand caressingly over one of the soft skirt folds spread on the sofa beside her.

"No, I do n't think you could," she said. "I hope you won't mind my saying so, but it always struck me that your latest Paris models at thirty-five and sixpence were painfully uncertain as to fit."

The baronet prided himself on enjoying a joke at his own expense—and, what is more, prided himself with justice. His voice and his face grew as genial as they knew how to be.

"They are—they are. I 've often remarked it myself. But you can 't do better at the price. If you 're well enough off to avoid our thirty-five and sixpenny reach-me-downs—made in Shoreditch and labeled Paris—why, take my advice and avoid 'em. But we cater for the woman with the short purse."

He was getting quite interested in the contest. So was Diana; she had never before credited her former tyrant with a sense of humor.

"See advertisement," she threw back at him.

"Eh?"

"Grinlay's is the place where a short purse goes as far as a long one anywhere else," she quoted; "I think that 's how it runs."

"Exactly. The lower middle-class woman—she 's our best customer—and she 's quite content with Paris models that don't fit. So she gets 'em. That 's the way to succeed, Mrs. Massingberd. Give the people what they want—good or bad, silk or shoddy—and give it 'em a half-penny cheaper than they can get it any where else, and you 're a made man."

"No doubt," Diana said drily, "but the

question is—how do you manage to give it 'em a halfpenny cheaper than they get it anywhere else?"

The baronet jerked his head wisely.

"Ah, that 's the secret. Organization —cut down working-expenses—"

"Working - expenses — that means wages, does n't it?"

Her tone was quite matter-of-fact, but all the same he looked up suspiciously.

"Wages is one item, of course."

"And usually the first to be knocked down! Oh, I quite understand that the way to succeed is to get other people to work for you for as little as they can be got to take—and to pocket the proceeds of the work. Only I wonder if success is worth buying at that price!"

Her face was flushed and her eyes bright. Sir Jabez smiled indulgently. Her little protest against the iron inevitability of the Laws of Supply and Demand

was so puny. At the same time he did not find it unpleasing. What should she, in her pink Paris frock, understand of the real serious business of life, the buying of commodities—among commodities being included the flesh and spirit called Labor—in the cheapest market, and the selling them again in the dearest. Such, to him, was the meaning of Commerce and Industry; which again meant Progress and the Survival of the Fittest. Being himself a survivor he approved of the system that had produced him—as was but natural.

"I can see you 're a bit of a sentimentalist, Mrs. Massingberd," he said. "Not that I object to that in a woman—on the contrary. But sentiment is one thing, business another. Business, my dear lady—it 's not a bit of good trying to disguise the fact—is war—commercial war, carried on with brains and cheque-books

instead of Maxims and lyddite shells."

"And war in which no quarter is given to the weaker side," Diana flashed, remembering the scant mercy she herself had received.

Sir Jabez's head jerked assent.

"Why should it be? In every 'ealthy state of society the weakest goes to the wall—because the wall is 'is proper place. If a man can 't keep his head above water he must go under; if he does n't know how to rule he must serve; if he can 't raise himself out of the ruck, in the ruck he 's got to stay. It 's no good whining about it—that 's life. And it 's just that which makes success all the more worth winning—the knowledge that you 've fought your way step by step, inch by inch, from the bottom of the ladder to the top."

In spite of the missing aspirates there was a certain dignity about the words, which Diana felt. She knew that the man

was thinking of himself and his own fierce and patient battle with life. She thought she understood, too, why it was that he and such as he, who have risen from the lowest rung, are often the least merciful to, the most impatient with, those who fail—since they know that those who fail have started out as well equipped as themselves.

"Step by step, inch by inch, from the bottom of the ladder to the top," she repeated. "As you have done?"

Sir Jabez laughed, well satisfied.

"Yes, as I have done. Mrs. Massingberd, I like to remember that I started life as a brat of a boy running errands."

"And I like you for remembering it," Diana said quickly. She spoke the truth; it was the trait in him that pleased her most. Still better satisfied, the baronet drew his chair up closer to her own.

"I should be a fool to try and forget it,"

he said bluntly. "Nobody else would. Besides, I 'm proud of it—proud to think that the little chap who began with two bob a week had the grit and the push to get to the top. It shows what a man can do if he sets his mind on a thing and sticks to his business—"

"And does n't indulge in sentiment—or spend his money in cheap trips to the Continent?" Diana suggested.

Sir Jabez shook his head with a smile that was at the same time indulgent and reproving.

"Quite so; but I 'm afraid, Mrs. Massingberd, it 's the lazy, shiftless chap that 'as your sympathy?"

"Of course he has my sympathy," Diana returned. "He wants it."

As she spoke the last words the door swung open and Mrs. Cantelupe bustled in. A fluent and copious letter-writer, her sympathy with Adelaide's undeserved

misfortune had run away with her pen, and, when at length she glanced from her completed epistle to the clock, she was horrified to find how long she had left her guests. Hastily committing her letter to the post-box, she sped back to Number Eleven and breathed a sigh of relief at finding Mrs. Massingberd still there.

"Has Eleanor gone? My dear Mrs. Massingberd, how disgraceful of me to leave you like this! Will you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, Sir Jabez has been entertaining me," Diana assured her. "We 've been talking economics."

"Economics," Mrs. Cantelupe repeated blankly. "Dear me—how very dull!"

Sir Jabez took the hint.

"P'raps then we 'd better defer the conclusion of our little discussion till another time," he said pompously. "I 'll go and 'ave a cigar in the garden. Good-night."

Mrs. Cantelupe breathed a sigh of relief as he vanished. "Dreadful person, is n't he? I was afraid he meant to stay."

She settled herself into an arm-chair, talking fussily and looking for an opening. She made a start at last with a direct question.

"Is this your first visit to Pontresina, Mrs. Massingberd?"

"My first visit to Switzerland," Diana corrected. "It is the fulfilment of a dream."

The opening was fairly promising. In accents of polite indifference Mrs. Cantelupe imagined that Diana was fond of traveling. Diana agreed. She was very fond of traveling. All the same she had been very little abroad.

Mrs. Cantelupe saw her chance and took it.

"I dare say your husband did not share

your pronounced taste for globe-trotting?" she suggested.

Diana looked up—and then down. She began to understand; Mrs. Cantelupe was making inquiries. For an instant she felt slightly alarmed—then amused. After all it was a situation she had foreseen; and she answered without a tremor.

"He strongly objected to it."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Cantelupe hesitated in the hope that the late Mr. Massingberd's reasons for the unfortunate objection might be explained; but Diana was also awaiting developments. It was necessary to try another tack and Mrs. Cantelupe looked thoughtfully at the back of the sofa.

"I wonder," she murmured, "I wonder—Massingberd is not a very common name—"

Diana's last doubts vanished. The at-

tack had become open and undisguised. What matter? She was quite ready for it.

"It is rather unusual," she assented politely.

"There was a Mr. Massingberd," her hostess went on reflectively, "a Mr. Massingberd that I met seven or eight years ago, at the Wetherby's place in Lincolnshire. Cyril Massingberd, I think the name was. Could it have been—?"

With a bland willingness to supply information, Mrs. Massingberd shook her head.

"My husband's name was Josiah."

The name struck her as distinctly pleasing.

"Josiah Massingberd," Mrs. Cantelupe repeated regretfully.

"Ah, then of course, it could not have been the same."

Diana agreed that it could not. A lit-

tle dashed, but feeling that something at least had been gained, Mrs. Cantelupe followed up the trail.

"Still it is very possible that they may have been related?"

Again Diana agreed; it was quite possible.

"Cyril Massingberd," Mrs. Cantelupe went on, "was one of the Wiltshire Massingberds, I believe."

Diana felt that the conversation must be given a new turn. There would be distinct danger in adopting the Wiltshire Massingberds. She leaned forward confidentially and smiled.

"You will think me a very extraordinary person, Mrs. Cantelupe, but I have n't the least idea whether my husband was a Wiltshire Massingberd or not. I really know hardly anything about his relations."

Mrs. Cantelupe's face showed that she did think her rather extraordinary, though

her comment of "Indeed!" was encouragingly polite.

"You see," Diana explained earnestly, "our married life was so very brief."

Mrs. Cantelupe's "Indeed!" was, this time, more sympathetic. Diana felt a wild desire to giggle after the fashion of Miss Jay. She had often imagined that she might be pressed for an account of herself, but she had never foreseen that she should heartily enjoy the ordeal. All she feared was her own inability to preserve a pathetic countenance. With a mighty effort she controlled her twitching mouth and sighed.

"So very brief," she repeated. "I sometimes feel as if it had never been—as if my life with Josiah had been nothing but a dream."

Mrs. Cantelupe's voice was more sympathetic still; but she held on steadily to the point.

"May I ask—?" she began.

Mrs. Massingberd's handkerchief went to her face and covered it.

"I had very much rather you did n't," she said. "Please forgive me, but I had very much rather—"

Behind the pocket-handkerchief her voice shook weakly and then died away. Mrs. Cantelupe, in consternation, began to apologize.

"My dear Mrs. Massingberd, I beg your pardon. I had no idea your bereavement was so recent. I shall never forgive myself—I ought not to have—"

Mrs. Massingberd, her emotion mastered, wiped her eyes and apologized in her turn.

"Oh, please, please, Mrs. Cantelupe. It is I who ought to beg your pardon for giving way to my feelings like this. It is very foolish of me."

Mrs. Cantelupe could not allow that it

was foolish. Mrs. Massingberd insisted.

"Oh, yes, it is. I ought to have more self-control. But you see my attachment to Josiah's—to my husband's—memory—is—" she hesitated for the word—"peculiar."

"Peculiar?" Mrs. Cantelupe echoed interrogatively. Diana, frank and confidential, shifted a little nearer to her.

"You do not know how much I owe to Josiah, Mrs. Cantelupe. Every day I realize more and more that everything that makes my life worth living—comfort, amusement, friends, even, if I may use the word in connection with myself, social success—they are all due, simply and solely to my position as his widow. Can you wonder that I am grateful to him for what he has done for me?"

Mrs. Cantelupe was amiably deprecatory.

"My dear Mrs. Massingberd, surely you

are a little too modest," she suggested. "As regards social success, your own very charming personality—if you will permit an old woman to say so—has had something to do with that."

Mrs. Massingberd shook her head decidedly.

"I am afraid," she said, "that in society, as we understand it, personality does not count for much unless it is backed by money."

Mrs. Cantelupe was obliged to admit that that was true, unfortunately.

"I have very good reason to know it," Diana sighed, "because I was not always as well off as I am now. I don't mind confessing to you that, after my father's death and before I—became the wife of Josiah Massingberd, I was in very straitened circumstances. Very straitened indeed."

Mrs. Cantelupe waxed even more sym-

pathetic than she had done over Josiah Massingberd's lamented decease.

"Dear, dear, how very trying. But your marriage changed all that of course?"

"Oh, quite changed it. Otherwise I should not be here."

Mrs. Cantelupe sighed contentedly. The interview was exceeding her wildest expectations. She was getting on—getting on very nicely indeed. Victor's prospects were brightening to a rosy glow and the idea of a hurried flight from Pontresina was already dismissed from her mind.

"It must have been a relief to you," she purred. "Straitened circumstances are always so very unpleasant."

Mrs. Massingberd agreed entirely—they were most unpleasant.

"I can quite understand," her hostess purred on, "your very right and natural feeling of gratitude towards a husband

who placed you beyond the need for petty economies."

The phrase appealed to Diana. She looked down at her embroidered skirt, at the tip of her evening shoe; and laughed gently.

"Yes, petty economies are a little out of my line at present. Of course—" and again her voice dropped to the confidential tone—"I do n't want you to imagine that I am a millionaire—or anything near it. On the contrary, I dare say that my income would seem comparatively small to you; but—"

She paused for a second while Mrs. Cantelupe held her breath expectantly.

"But, coming after the period of petty economies, I find that three hundred pounds a month is quite adequate for all my little wants."

Mrs. Cantelupe quivered exultantly, and, while a psalm of thanksgiving to

Mammon arose in her heart, her fingers pattered swiftly upon her skirt. She always did her sums that way.

"Three hundred pounds a month," she breathed with exquisite satisfaction. "That is three thousand six hundred a year."

And another manual calculation resulted in the happy certainty that the united incomes of the young couple would amount to over four thousand pounds per annum. The clouds had rolled away from the horizon and the peace and sunshine of her mind were outwardly reflected on her countenance; she longed only for the moment when she might shower the blessings of an aunt upon Victor Bretherton and his most desirable bride. But suddenly her happy confidence received a check. With the face of a mask, Mrs. Massingberd nodded her head.

"Three thousand six hundred a year,"

she repeated. "Yes, I suppose my income is at the rate of three thousand six hundred a year, for the present."

It was the last indifferently-spoken phrase that struck a chill into Mrs. Cantelupe's soul—the dire and threatening little words "for the present." True, they might mean nothing—might be simply a careless, involuntary phrase; but, on the other hand, they opened up a vista of dim but awful possibilities. The mere glimpse of these possibilities flustered her and deprived her of her wonted finesse; and, almost before she knew what she was doing, she heard her own voice asking—

"Does that mean—?"

She pulled herself up uneasily; but Mrs. Massingberd, bland and encouraging as ever, bent towards her with an inviting smile.

"You were going to say?" she suggested.

Mrs. Cantelupe, still uneasy, hesitated, glanced questioningly at her visitor's face, and then decided to see the thing through.

"I really do n't know—perhaps you will consider it an impertinence on my part—"

Mrs. Massingberd waved away the idea.

"Well, I was going to ask—you have been so very frank about your affairs and we seem to have become quite old friends during our little chat—but please, please do not answer the question if you think it impertinent or inquisitive."

Mrs. Massingberd's smile was still more inviting. She knew perfectly well that she should not think any such thing. Mrs. Cantelupe took her courage in both hands.

"Well, then, by your saying that your income was three thousand six hundred a year, for the present—did you mean that Mr. Massingberd—that your husband—imposed any—er—restrictions in his will?"

Diana's eyebrows shot up. Then her lips began to quiver and lift.

"Restrictions?" she echoed shakily.

"I mean," Mrs. Cantelupe explained, "with regard to your marrying again?"

The idea evidently appealed to Mrs. Massingberd's sense of humor. She leaned back and laughed with beaming eyes.

"With regard to my marrying again? Oh, dear, no—no restrictions whatever."

The psalm of thanksgiving—drowned during the last few moments by a tremulous motif in a minor key—welled up again in Mrs. Cantelupe's heart and a long-drawn sigh of relief escaped from her lips. She hastened to explain her obvious satisfaction.

"I am delighted to hear it. I have always thought that such restrictions—and I have known of several instances where they have been imposed by men who have

left their property to their wives—are so exceedingly unfair, especially where a young woman is concerned."

Mrs. Massingberd's point of view was exactly the same; she thought such restrictions on a woman's inclinations eminently unfair.

"But," she added reflectively, "from what I know of Josiah, I am sure that he would never have dreamed of such a thing."

Mrs. Cantelupe beamed; laughing with happiness she leaned forward and patted the back of Mrs. Massingberd's hand.

"And you are sure you quite forgive my curiosity in asking?"

"I understand that it was entirely prompted by your very kindly interest in myself."

"Exactly."

"But at the same time," Mrs. Massingberd went on, "I think it is exceedingly

unlikely—more than unlikely—that I shall ever marry again."

Mrs. Cantelupe shook her head to the accompaniment of incredulous laughter.

"Oh, you 'll change your mind fast enough when the right man comes along. You 're not going?" as Diana rose from her seat.

Indeed she was. She had some letters to write, she explained, and, besides, she had made quite a visitation already—her hostess must be longing to get rid of her.

"On the contrary," Mrs. Cantelupe declared, "it has been delightful of you to waste your time chatting with me. You are staying on here for the present, I suppose?"

There was an imperceptible pause. Diana's back was to the lamp and her hostess did not see her lip straighten and her eyes grow hard instead of smiling. Then, with

a little shrug, she answered lightly enough—

"Oh, yes, I am staying on for the present. These mountains fascinate me. I don't think I can tear myself away from them yet."

She held out her hand and Mrs. Cantelupe pressed it affectionately.

"Then I hope we shall see more of you, Mrs. Massingberd—a very great deal more of you. By the way, have you made any plans—any arrangements for to-morrow?"

Diana shook her head. No, she had made no plans as yet.

"Because I was thinking of asking Eleanor Whyte-Fraser to join us in a little excursion to the Bernina Hospice—carriages to the Hospice, and then those who like a scramble can go further. Victor will come to look after us, and, if you have

nothing to do, I shall be so pleased if you will make one of our little party."

Again Diana hesitated—but only for an instant. Then she smiled consent.

"It is really very kind of you to ask me and I shall enjoy it immensely. I have n't been as far as the Bernina Hospice yet."

"Then that is settled," Mrs. Cantelupe nodded happily, "I will make all the arrangements with Eleanor, and let you know the time we start in the morning."

As the door closed behind Mrs. Massingberd she sat down and sighed with utter content. How fortunate that she had thought of inventing to-morrow's excursion on the spur of the moment. Victor would be only too glad to come and Eleanor, always good-natured and interested in matrimonial arrangements, could be counted on to fall in with her plans. The party should not consist of more than four,

and, the Bernina Hospice once reached, it should split into equal parts. She and Eleanor would rest at the hotel or in its neighborhood; the others, as she had said to Mrs. Massingberd, could "go further." It was her business, henceforth to see that the path of true love was made smooth to her nephew's feet. She looked out at the moon whitening the mountains and felt her mind attuned to the peaceful beauty of the night.

"Three thousand six hundred a year," she said softly.

CHAPTER VIII

DIANA MASSINGBERD, meanwhile, was extricating herself from the folds of her pink Paris gown, and, as she did so, she laughed. She was very glad she had had that amusing little conversation with Mrs. Cantelupe. It had been delightful in itself—an enjoyable episode; but it had been something else besides—something of a revelation. But for that conversation she would have held to her determination of leaving Pontresina within forty-eight hours; now she had no intention of doing anything so foolish and self-sacrificing. The idea of taking to flight for fear of damaging the heart of Victor Bretherton who—as she imagined

—had set his aunt on to pump his inamorata before venturing to compromise himself by a too marked attention! Henceforth she need have no compunction on the subject of her dealings with Mrs. Cantelupe's nephew; his admiration, interested though it was, was quite a pleasant item in her month's holiday, and she would make the most of it, as she did of the other good things that came in her way.

With regard to Victor's imaginary share in Mrs. Cantelupe's investigations she was of course wrong; but, with regard to his attitude towards herself, she did not do him so very much injustice. He had begun to admire her, true; but he had also begun to ask himself inwardly whether he was in a position to admire her—whether, in short, Mrs. Massingberd was a woman who would require from her husband a literal fulfilment of that portion of the marriage vow which concerns itself with

the endowment of worldly goods. If that was the case, of course—well, there you were! It would be most unfortunate, rotten hard luck in fact, but perhaps he had better shift his quarters, without delay. If the result of Diana's cross-examination had been less satisfactory, Mrs. Cantelupe would have found him quite ready, if not extremely willing, to deliver himself from temptation.

As it was, he was relieved, almost intensely relieved, when that entirely satisfactory result was made known to him by his aunt, as it speedily was, in smiling and diplomatic fashion. Not that he had definitely made up his mind to ask Diana to become his wife! it was, as yet, early in the day to decide on such an important step. But he had got quite far enough to realize that it was by no means improbable that he should take that step in the end; and, meanwhile, and now that his aunt's

discourse had cleared the financial atmosphere, he intended to see a great deal more of Diana—with a view to future developments. With regard to her feelings toward himself, he was fairly happy; Diana had received a good deal of attention during the last few days but, so far as he could see, she preferred his company to anyone else's. Altogether he had a comfortable sensation that things were going on as they should; and he slept very well that night.

In the morning they started for the Bernina Hospice—Victor cheerful and at ease with the world, Mrs. Cantelupe radiant, Eleanor Whyte-Fraser bored but amiable, and Diana cool and amused. The expedition was a complete success and a source of enjoyment to everyone but Mrs. Whyte-Fraser, who became openly depressed while she and Mrs. Cantelupe sat at the wayside awaiting the return of the wan-

derers. She pronounced the view heavenly, but said it made her eyes ache.

They had coffee at the mountain hotel and then drove back to Pontresina—Diana flushed and tired, less amused than she had been in the morning and, she hardly knew, why, very much happier. There had been a good deal of scorn in her soul when she had started; something had withered it during the day. Perhaps the pale majesty and the pure clean air of the Alps; perhaps the cheerful, good-natured companionship of Bretherton himself. After all, and there was no denying it, he had his good points; there were the makings of a man in him somewhere; she believed if he had been differently bred he could have been something better than a fortune-hunter. What was really lacking in him was a sense of proportion; to the small things of life he attached an inordinate value—the value set upon them by

the narrow little world in which he lived and moved and had his being. If he could have got outside that narrow world and seen things as they really are—yes, she felt sure he would have had the makings of a man.

She was very happy that night. She explained to Sir Jabez at dinner that the air of the Alps always went to her head. After dinner she drifted into the music-room where Jimmy Tollemache was entertaining his friends with comic songs—the friends joining in the chorus with a frank enjoyment of noise for the sake of noise, which Diana was just in the mood to appreciate. Finally someone shoved Jimmy off the music-stool and began a waltz; the other men pushed the chairs to the wall and Bretherton was first at Diana's side with an unceremonious "Come along, Mrs. Massingberd" . . .

When she went up to bed her thoughts

of him were kinder than they had been the night before. He was after her imaginary fortune, of course; but, if he was treating her unfairly in that respect, she, after all, was scarcely acting towards him with level and beautiful straightforwardness! She did not admit that he or anyone else had the right to demand straightforwardness from her; while she had money to pay her way, she could do what she liked. Still . . . And, fortune-hunter as he was, it was possible, just possible, that a man might at the same time be in love with a woman and her money!

That morning she had told Herr Ritter that she intended to stay on at the Hotel Engadine for another fortnight, and she did not regret her determination. But, as regarded Captain Bretherton, she decided to be careful. Again she told herself that she did not want to hurt him.

As yet she had no fear at all of hurting herself.

. . . . . .

Diana sat in her room with a stump of pencil in her hand, and before her a scribbled half-sheet of paper and some hundred-franc notes, held down by a small heap of gold and silver coins. The scribblings on the paper were calculations; she had been seventeen days at the Hotel Engadine and her day of reckoning had come. Her face was brown and healthy but, under its tan, a little pale.

She added up the figures and then slowly counted through the sum of her worldly wealth, compared the two totals thoughtfully—and sighed. There was only one conclusion to be arrived at; she must ask for her bill that morning, leave that afternoon. Herr Ritter's account settled and the servants tipped, she would have

enough to take her back to England—barely.

She put the pencil between her lips and bit it hard while her eyes looked straight out of the window. She thought of Miss Smithers; she could almost hear her voice as she sat combing her hair and asking, "and when it is all spent?"

It was all spent—all. When she arrived in London there would remain to her the memory of her month and a few smart frocks. The latter represented a certain amount of capital, of course; they would fetch something at a second-hand dealer's. The thought of parting with them sent a swift pang through her, they were more than the outward and visible signs of her power and glory: they were the actual means by which she had attained to it. When they were gone, only her memories would be left.

She had told Miss Smithers that these would be a consolation; that, even when all else was lost, it would be something for her to feel and know that, once and for a short few weeks, she had ordered her life according to her own desires. When she said that she had believed it; now she knew that sweetness that is only a memory tastes very bitter in the mouth.

Until this morning she had put the future away from her with dogged determination. Once or twice during the last day or two the thought had come, like a knife-stab: "this is almost the end," but she had thrust it behind her instantly. Now it was the end, and the future had to be faced.

Voices and laughter came up through her open window and she moved restlessly and frowned with a sudden flash of antagonism and the unreasonable anger that misery feels against happiness. To-mor-

row her place would know her no more; to-morrow London and all that London meant would have swallowed her up; she would have gone under and the waves would have swept over her head; but the life that she had been living for these last ecstatic weeks would go on merrily as usual and no one would miss or regret her.

"At any rate," she said, under her breath, "not for very long."

She leaned her chin upon her hand and her lips closed in a straight line. She was thinking of the only person who would be likely to miss her. No doubt he would be uncomfortable—perhaps even a little unhappy—for a day or two; her absence, after their constant companionship, would leave a certain blank in his existence, and he was not resourceful about filling up the blanks in his existence. Still there was always Samaden and the golf-links; he had spent most of his time there before she

came. Or he could move on somewhere else where there were more golf-links—or shooting.

Suddenly she rose and began to walk up and down the room, angry with her own injustice. He did care, she had seen it in his eyes, no further back than yesterday.

Supposing she had let him speak—what would have happened? He had been on the very point of doing so, had reddened and begun to stammer out an unintelligible phrase when she, frightened, had suddenly broken in with a laughingly sarcastic remark that had froze the words on his lips. He had relapsed into a rather sulky silence, only answering in monosyllables as she hurried him back to the hotel. And that was the second time within the last three days that, to her certain knowledge, he had screwed his courage up to declaration pitch; the other

evening, on the verandah, her instinct had suddenly warned her what was coming. She had half risen from her chair, meditating instant flight; and then, in the nick of time, Sir Jabez Grinlay had loomed slowly round the corner, and been tremendously astonished by the warmth with which she had invited him to join her and her companion.

But supposing he had managed to get the words out; supposing in due form, he had asked her to become his wife—what would she have done? There would have been only two courses open to her. A simple, blank refusal—or an explanation, a confession. She felt instinctively that, even if she had started with the refusal, it would have come to the confession in the end.

And how would he have received it? Would there have been the faintest chance—?

"No," she said slowly and aloud, "there would n't. Not the faintest."

For she had come to know him very well during the last weeks. She had laughed with him, talked with him, walked with him and been glad to have him with her; but hardly ever, except now and again for a few minutes at a time, had she been able to forget the existence of the invisible gulf that divided them. He lived in an atmosphere of social prejudice which was so entirely a part of his life that he was hardly aware of its existence. He breathed it as he breathed the air. Lines that to her were negligible, if not imaginary, to him were hard and fast barriers, impossible to over-top. She believed that in the bottom of his lazy heart he loved her more than her money; but she also knew him for a creature molded by routine and hedged about by the traditions of his class and caste. With a man so molded, so trained

and so indulgent to himself, only a passion almost savage in its intensity would avail to break the pleasant fetters in which his life was passed. And she did not flatter herself that she had inspired such a passion in him; he was not the man in whom such a passion could be inspired. If he had been he would not have been Victor Bretherton, the easy-going, the shiftless, the slothful—and the lovable.

She had reached the point at which she acknowledged that she cared—very much. He was ridiculous, selfish, idle, narrow, in some ways even, contemptible; but she cared for him. It was no use trying to disguise the fact. She had played with edged tools and one of her memories would be a scar.

With her hands touching each other behind her back, she stood staring down at the carpet, motionless, while the breeze from the open window fluttered the little

heap of hundred-franc notes. She roused herself at last and glanced at her watch. It was nearly twelve o'clock. The train from Samaden started somewhere about two, so that she had not over much time. She gathered up the money, put it away, and ran downstairs to consult the time-tables. Victor was out of the way, she knew; from her window she had seen him stroll off down the hill. She hoped he would hear nothing of her departure until it was an accomplished fact.

As she reached the foot of the stairs Mrs. Whyte-Fraser came sailing into the hall through the front door.

"Oh, Mrs. Massingberd, there you are! I came over on purpose to find you. We 're having a ridiculous donkey-party this afternoon. Will you come? I don't know where we are to go, but Tom has commandeered all the donkeys in the place. I 've just met Captain Bretherton

and asked him, and I 'm counting on you."

Diana explained that it was impossible; she had been called back to England suddenly, was obliged to leave by the afternoon train. Mrs. Whyte-Fraser was loud in lamentations and regrets; most disappointed—it was so unfortunate. She hoped it was not bad news that was taking Mrs. Massingberd away? Merely a matter of business? How annoying. Then, with a hope—meaningly expressed—that they should meet again *very* soon, she swept away to beat up more recruits for the "ridiculous donkey-party."

Diana picked up a time-table in the hall and ran her fingers down one of the columns; and with a queer, almost sick, thrill she realized how soon she would be in London again—by four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Mechanically she began jotting down some of the figures upon a piece of paper—the halts at Zurich, Basle and

Laon; then, catching sight of a waiter fidgeting about with the tables in the verandah, she called to him, told him to ask for her bill at once and to order a carriage in time to catch the quarter-past two at Samaden.

CHAPTER IX

AS she tossed the time-table down and turned to go upstairs, her name, twice repeated, fell breathlessly upon her ears and Mrs. Cantelupe rustled in through the verandah. She had just met Mrs. Whyte-Fraser in the garden and from her had learned of Mrs. Massingberd's unexpected departure. Hence her haste and excitement.

"My dear Mrs. Massingberd," she panted, "I have just met Eleanor Whyte-Fraser and she horrified me by telling me you are leaving us to-day. Surely it is n't true?"

"I am afraid it is," Diana nodded. "I —well, as a matter of fact—I have stayed on longer than I intended already and I

find I must get back to London at once."

Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's distress was as nothing to Mrs. Cantelupe's. She was more than distressed; she was alarmed. Her mind had already leaped to the conclusion that in this sudden departure there was more than met the eye, and Diana's pale face and nervous, restrained manner confirmed her suspicions. She had not the faintest intention of allowing Mrs. Massingberd to go before she had found out what the matter was; and, before Diana realized what was happening, she found that with Mrs. Cantelupe's arm slipped firmly through her own, she was being drawn through the door of Number Eleven. She would gladly have avoided the interview had it been possible; irritable and out of spirits, she felt no desire for a final fencing-match with Victor's aunt.

"Dear, dear," Mrs. Cantelupe was lamenting. "It really is most unfortunate.

I was quite in hopes that you intended to stay on all the summer."

Diana turned brusquely to the window and looked out. She knew that her face was not quite under control, and she wanted it out of range of Mrs. Cantelupe's inquiring, inquisitive gaze.

"I only wish I could," she said. "I shall never forget the happy time I 've had here—never as long as I live. It will be something to remember at any rate, even if I never see mountains like that again—and sky and clean air and white snow. Yes, it will be something to remember."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when she was annoyed with herself for having uttered them before Mrs. Cantelupe. She would not have uttered them if she had been entirely mistress of herself. She felt instinctively that her companion would draw her own conclusions from them; and she did. Mrs.

Cantelupe jerked her head sagely in the direction of Diana's back hair, with the air of one who is beginning to understand, and then, smoothing her face, she went on cheerfully.

"But there's no reason why you should n't see Pontresina again, is there? If you like the place so much, why not come again next year?"

Diana laughed gently.

"Why not?" she said, "why not, indeed?"

"But meanwhile," Mrs. Cantelupe persisted. "I shall miss you dreadfully—I shall indeed."

"It's very good of you to say so." Diana answered mechanically.

"And," Mrs. Cantelupe went on, the while she shifted her position so as to get a view of something besides back hair, "and I am sure that Victor will miss you more than I shall. I know how thor-

oughly he has enjoyed all your walks and little expeditions together."

But Diana was prepared and did not flinch. Her voice was a little restrained but her face was quite composed.

"I have enjoyed them, too," she said. "It has been most kind of him to show me my way about."

"Most kind of *him,* my dear Mrs. Massingberd?" Mrs. Cantelupe smiled amiably and waved her hand with a gesture intended to express that the kindness had been all on the other side. "Now I hope —I really do hope—that this unexpected departure of yours is not going to put an end to our very pleasant friendship."

Diana laughed and then checked herself; she was conscious that, if she was not careful, she might laugh too much.

"Oh—why should it?"

"Exactly," Mrs. Cantelupe agreed, "why should it? I shall be at home—

in Mount Street—by the middle of October at the latest. Wednesday is my day, but I hope you won't stand on ceremony with me; I shall always be at home to you whenever you have an afternoon to spare. But what are your plans? Shall you be in London for the winter?"

Again the wild desire to laugh took Diana by the throat. She gulped it down convulsively and, red in the face from the struggle, stammered out something about the impossibility of making any arrangements for the future until after her arrival in England.

"Well, as soon as you have fixed your plans," Mrs. Cantelupe insisted, "you must write and let me know. You will? Now that's a promise and I shall look forward to a letter from you very soon —and I am sure Victor will be most anxious to know you haven't forgotten your Pontresina friends."

Diana was beginning to feel that she could not stand much more; Mrs. Cantelupe's searching, inquisitive eyes were getting on her nerves, and the booming of the hall clock opened a welcome way of escape.

"That 's twelve," she said, holding out her hand. "I must be off. I have n't half done my packing yet, and the carriage is to be round for me before half-past one."

Mrs. Cantelupe's face betrayed her consternation. Within an hour and a half Mrs. Massingberd would be whirled away —she had only an hour and a half in which to patch up the misunderstanding which she felt sure was the cause of Diana's hasty departure. Diana's face, voice and manner all assured her that something was wrong; she must have taken offence at something that Victor had done or left undone. Knowing her

nephew as she did, Mrs. Cantelupe opined that it was at something he had left undone. Her alarm was intense. To allow Mrs. Massingberd to go with the breach unhealed might mean the definite ruin of Victor's hopes and her own; and the time was so short. She clung to Diana's hand.

"So soon!" she exclaimed. "But, my dear . . . Has Victor any idea that you are leaving by that train?"

Diana drew her hand away quickly.

"I really don't know," she said.

"But have you told him?" Mrs. Cantelupe persisted.

"No," Diana admitted, as carelessly as she could. "I think I said to him the other day that I should be leaving Pontresina very shortly; but it was only this morning that I found I should be obliged to start to-day."'

"And you have not seen him this morning—since you made up your mind?"

"No, I have not seen him."

Mrs. Cantelupe could have wrung her hands. Evidently the breach was serious; Mrs. Massingberd must be really and bitterly offended when she decided to steal away without a word of good-by to her admirer. There was only one grain of hope. Diana's attempt at secrecy betrayed a distrust of herself and of her own powers of resistance; if the pair could only come face to face again all might yet be well.

"Then, of course, he can't know," she exclaimed. "I wonder where he is; he will be so dreadfully distressed if—"

She broke off and made for the bell. Diana tried to interpose.

"I don't think it will be any use inquiring—I am quite certain he is out. If he does n't come back before I start, you must say good-by to him for me."

But Mrs. Cantelupe, at her wits' end,

was not to be appeased. By a bolt from the blue her dearest hopes were threatened with utter ruin and she could have wept with rage.

"But my dear Mrs. Massingberd, I really don't know what he will say. He will never forgive me—never—if I let you go without . . ."

As she grew more flustered, Diana grew calmer.

"I 'm afraid," she said lightly, "that I can hardly expect the Zurich train to wait until Captain Bretherton comes back from his walk. If I don't see him, mind you give him a pretty message from me! And now I really must fly and look after my packing."

"But—" Mrs. Cantelupe protested helplessly as her finger again pressed the bell-knob; then, breaking off, she turned hastily as a step sounded upon the verandah close to the open window. She had

hoped it might be her nephew's; it was Sir Jabez Grinlay's.

"Oh, Sir Jabez," she exclaimed, "you have n't seen my nephew anywhere about, have you?"

"I 'ave n't," the baronet said curtly; he disliked Mrs. Cantelupe. "Want him particularly?"

Mrs. Cantelupe replied that she did, and explained why. Perhaps she hoped that Sir Jabez would assist her by departing in search of her missing nephew. But Sir Jabez did nothing of the sort; instead, he tossed away his cigar, stepped over the window-sill and walked up to Mrs. Massingberd.

Mrs. Cantelupe delivered a third and more violent assault upon the electric-bell; and then, her impatience getting the better of her, she swept from the room like a whirlwind, calling loudly for a waiter.

"So you're leaving us, Mrs. Massingberd," Sir Jabez said. "What's taking you away so suddenly?"

Diana smiled faintly and held out her hand.

"Holidays can't last for ever, can they?"

"No, of course not—of course not." He scraped his throat loudly and, drawing himself up, stared straight over her head, and then added, with sudden decision:

"Business is business."

The remark admitted of no contradiction, and with a good-by nod, Diana turned to go; but, with a sudden alertness for which she would hardly have given him credit, he reached the door before her.

"One moment, Mrs. Massingberd. I want you to answer a question before you go."

His face was perfectly stiff and expres-

sionless. She glanced up at him a little impatiently; she was longing to be alone.

"Yes," she said, "what is it?"

"How would you like me for a husband?"

She stood stock-still and looked at him. Then a quotation from "Alice" rushed into her mind: "He said it very loud and clear." It exactly described the manner of Sir Jabez's wooing. Still, she did not feel the least inclined to laugh. In her eyes he was ungainly but not undignified. His face was as emotionless as wood; but all the same she knew that this was love, as felt and understood by Sir Jabez Grinlay.

Complete surprise deprived her of words; she had never guessed that the baronet's attentions meant this! Here was a turning of the tables with a vengeance—the head of Grinlay's Emporiums suing for the love of the assistant

he had sacked with ignominy. Grinlay gave her a moment and then spoke.

"A straightforward answer, please—no beating about the bush. I 'm a business man—" He stopped suddenly with a dry, little choke.

"Then I 'm afraid it must be 'no,' " she said.

His expression was as wooden as ever, but his voice was not quite so aggressively loud as he asked, "You would n't like a little time to think it over?"

"I 'm afraid not," she repeated hastily. "I 'm—sorry."

She made a half-step towards the door, hoping he would move and let her pass; but he still stood barring the way.

"Yet there 's a good many women would consider it a good offer. Forty thousand a year, to say nothing of the title. It 's brand new of course, but—"

"You would n't like me to accept you

for what you 've got?" she said quickly, anxious only to get away.

He looked down at her—one comprehensive glance that swept her from her hair to her shoes—and then replied deliberately. "I 'm not so sure that I should n't. If you 'd take me now for what I 've got, I believe I 'd chance your caring—later on."

She looked at him in amazement, wondering if this was the iron-hard man she had hated at Clapham. How much more human and tolerable he was in love than in business. She answered him gently:

"Some day you 'll be glad that I did n't let you chance it, Sir Jabez."

She held out her hand and he took it, but made no attempt to press it.

"You 're the only woman I ever met who has no respect for money."

She drew her hand away with an attempt at a laugh.

"That only shows how little you know of me. I 'm not at all disinterested, really —I 've known the time when I felt as if I could sell my soul for a five-pound note."

"Oh! You have, have you?" he said sharply. "Then your soul 's gone up in price since then—you won't take forty thousand a year for it now. What 's sent up the value? Another bidder in the market, eh?"

The suddenness of the attack brought the blood to her cheeks with a rush. She opened her lips angrily, but his harsh, insistent, bullying voice drowned her remonstrance.

"There is, and you can 't deny it. You 're going to throw yourself away on that fool of a guardsman—a clever woman like you! I thought you 'd more brains. A young idiot—a puppy who has spent his life playing at soldiers and

has n't even the sense to stick to the little money he 's got—"

"Or the heartlessness to grind a fortune out of underpaid work-girls," Diana flashed furiously.

"One for me, eh?" Sir Jabez said grimly. "So you 're going to have him, are you?"

"That is a grossly impertinent question," she returned, white with anger. "You have no right to assume anything of the sort."

"I 've a perfect right to assume what you are not able to deny."

Between pain and anger she was losing her head, and, instead of holding her tongue, she retorted passionately: "You are perfectly wrong. Captain Bretherton is nothing to me—nothing!"

Sir Jabez Grinlay forgot his manners. He had no intrinsic respect for women,

as women; and, when the exigencies of the case demanded it, he knew how to handle them roughly. He did so now.

"That 's something very like a lie, my lady! You 'll have him if he 'll have you."

There was a savage and brutal truth about the words that sent them home; and Diana stood aghast and quivering. Only flight was left to her, and she stretched out her hand to open the door, while her antagonist, grimly satisfied with his victory, stood aside to let her pass. Then, as she turned the handle, a cheerful, drawling voice from the verandah fell upon her ears—Bretherton's voice.

"Oh, there you are, Mrs. Massingberd. I 've been looking for you all over the place. Should you like a turn before luncheon?"

"No, thanks," she said curtly and without turning her head, conscious of the

sneering scrutiny of Sir Jabez' gray eyes. "I have n't time now—I have other things to do."

And the door closed behind her while Bretherton, in ignorance of the storm he had interrupted, came down into the room and requested Sir Jabez for a match. The latter tossed him his box in silence; and Bretherton never guessed how nearly it was aimed at his head. The maker of Grinlay's Emporiums did not take defeat well; like Miss Pringle, victory was more in his line. And, in this case, the bitterness of failure was enhanced by an honest and utter contempt for the man who had, as he believed, carried away the prize for which he had competed in vain. If only the creature had been a man—so ran his thoughts—he could have forgiven Diana; but to be ousted by a lounger who had idled his way into her heart on the strength of a fair amount of good looks

and a plentiful lack of brains! Sir Jabez felt all the bitter indignation of the just man struggling with undeserved misfortune. He caught sight of a red-backed, continental Bradshaw—Mrs. Cantelupe's property—lying on the table and strode across the room to fetch it.

"Thinking of moving on?" Bretherton asked from the sofa.

"Yes."

"Oh—when?"

"To-morrow," Sir Jabez replied curtly, as he ran his finger down the Basle-Folkestone column. It would have been to-day—but Diana had to be given a start."

"Where to?" Bretherton inquired.

"London."

"London?" Victor was almost sympathetic. "What 's takin' you to London in August?"

"Business."

"What a beastly nuisance!"

"I dare say you think so," Sir Jabez returned still more curtly. There was something so gratingly unpleasant about his tones, that Bretherton, lounging on the sofa, turned a lazy eye to look at him.

"And don't you?" he inquired, between two puffs of his cigarette.

Sir Jabez did not. His tone was still gratingly unpleasant, and it began to dawn upon Victor that he was out of temper and trying to be disagreeable. The suspicion did not excite him much, and he merely yawned and remarked:

"Tastes differ."

"They do," Sir Jabez agreed unamiably. "Your sort of life—all play and no work, get yourself up in the morning and play golf and lounge—would kill me in three months."

"Thanks," Bretherton returned, reflecting that it was a pity Sir Jabez did not

see his way to try the particular form of suicide described.

"And my sort of life," the baronet went on, still more unamiably, "hard work and stick at it from morning till night, would knock you out in three days."

Bretherton reddened in spite of himself. There was a sledge-hammer rudeness and directness about the attack which it was impossible to ignore; the only way to parry it was by an affectation of studied indifference.

"Thanks awfully," he drawled.

"But there," Sir Jabez snorted as he flung the red-covered Bradshaw noisily on the table, "you need n't mind that. It 's your sort—the idle, shiftless sort—that gets the best out of life, at any rate, as far as the women are concerned."

"That 's a comfort," the other replied, still nettled but outwardly unruffled. Sir

Jabez, fairly started, hardly noticed the interruption.

"It 's just that—your shiftlessness and 'elplessness—that appeals to 'em, I suppose. They know you could n't get on without 'em and the rest of us can—thank heaven for that! Whether they fail us or not, we 've always got our work—thank heaven for that, too—and the place in the world that we 've made for ourselves. Which is more than you've got or ever will!"

His harsh voice ceased abruptly and, without another word, he wheeled stiffly round, stepped over the window-sill and was gone, leaving Captain Bretherton sitting on the sofa in a state of wondering uncertainty as to whether it was the heat or the hotel whiskey which had played havoc with Sir Jabez's liver and temper and manners.

CHAPTER X

CAPTAIN BRETHERTON was still lounging on the sofa when, five minutes later, Mrs. Cantelupe came panting upon the verandah. When she saw her nephew through the window she stopped short, feeling as if she could have hit him with her parasol. While she, perspiring with heat and anxiety, had been hunting for him in vain round the hotel grounds, he had been lying back on the sofa-cushions sending smoke-rings up to the ceiling. She was very angry and she looked it.

"Oh, there you are," she exclaimed, shutting her parasol with an aggressive snap.

"Yes, here I am," her nephew returned pleasantly. "Did you want me?"

"I should think I did!"

There was such a world of meaning in her voice that Bretherton was moved to inquire if anything was up.

"Anything up?" his aunt echoed scornfully. "There is—and it's this: Mrs. Massingberd is leaving for England by the next train."

Captain Bretherton stared at her—and then straightened his back and set his feet on the floor.

"God bless my soul, no!"

Mrs. Cantelupe laughed bitterly.

"She is packing her trunks at this moment and starts for the station at half-past one."

"At half-past one," Victor repeated, with a glance at the clock. "Why on earth didn't she say something about it to me? I say, Aunt Emma, what's taking her away so suddenly?"

"She says business," Mrs. Cantelupe

returned with a shrug of her shoulders. "But I can very well guess what the business is."

The scornful significance in her tones irritated Bretherton.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked impatiently.

Mrs. Cantelupe leaned forward and paused impressively.

"You have said nothing to her?" she demanded, in the tone of one who brings a damning accusation.

"Said nothing?" her nephew repeated, puzzled for a moment, and then, as the light of her meaning dawned on him, "Oh—er—no! That is to say—nothing definite."

Mrs. Cantelupe threw out her hands despairingly.

"Then you ought to have done so. It is disgraceful of you, Victor—simply disgraceful.

"Disgraceful?" her nephew repeated. "Oh, come now, Aunt Emma—"

But Mrs. Cantelupe was not going to be silenced, neither was she in the mood to give ear to remonstrance or excuse.

"I repeat, it is simply disgraceful of you to let your opportunities slip by in this idiotic manner; I can call it nothing else than idiotic. I have no patience with you. And it has been most unfair to her as well."

She pulled up suddenly for breath—she was still exhausted by her hurried and heated search—and the culprit found an opportunity to get in a word in his own defence.

"My dear Aunt Emma, as far as that goes, though I have n't said anything definite to Di—to Mrs. Massingberd—I 'm sure I 've shown her quite plainly what my feelings are towards her."

"My dear Victor," his aunt retorted,

"that is not enough; you ought to have spoken before now."

"But after all," Bretherton objected, "we have n't known each other so very long—less than three weeks."

"That does n't matter," Mrs. Cantelupe snapped back. "The point is that I am perfectly certain she is offended by your silence—as she has every right to be. Her manner was very constrained when I mentioned you just now; she evidently did not wish to see you again before she went. She feels, of course, that she has given you plenty of chances and is naturally piqued that you have never attempted to take advantage of them."

This was blatantly unjust; his attempts had been failures, but they had been made. He began to protest.

"Never attempted! Why—"

He got no further. Mrs. Cantelupe stormed him down excitedly.

"Don't argue, Victor! Listen to me. It is because she is piqued at your silence that she has suddenly made up her mind to leave—and not only to leave, but to slip off to England without so much as saying 'good-by' to you, or letting you know anything about it until she had actually gone. That was evidently her intention, and it was a good thing for you—nothing less than a mercy—that I happened to find it out in time. You have behaved most foolishly, Victor—most foolishly. You to ought have had the sense to realize that a woman in Mrs. Massingberd's position—a woman who, to put it vulgarly, can pick and choose—does not expect to be kept dangling on in uncertainty while a man is making up his mind whether or not he intends to propose to her!"

This was a new aspect of the case, and Victor was staggered and a little re-

morseful. Women, he reflected ruefully, were so difficult to understand; perhaps, when Diana had seemed as if she wanted to put him off yesterday, she had really wanted him to go on.

"Upon my soul," he said, "I 'm awfully sorry if I 've offended her. It 's—it 's the last thing I wanted to do; you know that, Aunt Emma. I would n't have hurt her feelings for the world."

Mrs. Cantelupe sniffed contemptuously.

"You have not only hurt her feelings, my dear boy, but you have gone very near to losing her altogether. I conclude"—this with intense sarcasm—"that you do mean to propose to her—some time or another?"

"Of course I do," Bretherton returned. He flung away the cigarette that had been burning itself away between his fingers, got up and stood looking down upon his aunt. "I—well, I don't mind saying it

to you, Aunt Emma—I 've got to care for her awfully. She—she 's a downright good sort."

"Then, why on earth haven't you come to the point before now?" Mrs. Cantelupe retorted. "It 's no good saying these things to me; you should say them to her. And you 've had plenty of opportunity; I 've seen to that."

An equable temper was one of Captain Bretherton's virtues—but it had been a good deal tried that morning, and his aunt's jibes were beginning to wear away his patience. He answered rather sulkily that it was a deuced awkward thing to do.

Mrs. Cantelupe's temper—naturally far less equable than her nephew's—had vanished long ago, and her answer was a positive snap.

"Nonsense! I 've no patience with such lunacy, when you 've been together every day for more than a fortnight."

"I know that," Bretherton protested, goaded into self-defence; "I know that, but—"

"But what!"

"Well, I 've been on the point of getting it out half-a-dozen times; but then either I 've funked it or else something has turned up to put me off my stroke. Once—just when I 'd got the words on the very tip of my tongue—that old ass of a Grinlay came plunging in and it was all up with me."

If he had expected sympathy for the difficulties of his wooing, he must have been disappointed; Mrs. Cantelupe's "Really, Victor!" expressed not sympathy but concentrated scorn.

"Oh, it 's all very well for you to be so down on me," her nephew objected in injured accents, "but, after all, I 'm not at all sure in my own mind that she cares a brass button about me."

Mrs. Cantelupe had no misgivings whatever upon the subject and her answer was emphatic and decided.

"Of course she does."

"I 've thought so sometimes," Victor agreed doubtfully, "but other times, she 's different—particularly the last day or two. Seems to shut up and draw into herself—says such queer things—"

"What sort of things?" his aunt demanded.

"Oh, contemptuous and sarcastic and—I can 't exactly explain, but once or twice it has seemed to me as if she was trying to put me off before I had gone too far."

"Rubbish!" Mrs. Cantelupe pronounced decisively. "All your imagination."

"Oh, it 's all right for you to say rubbish," her nephew grunted. "But I 'm not at all certain that she 'll have me when I do ask her—and that 's the truth. And,

after all, why should she? I 'm not much of a catch as far as money goes—and even if I were, I 'm not half clever enough for her."

Mrs. Cantelupe had never committed the mistake of placing too high a value upon the purely intellectual qualities. She merely said:

"Nonsense, Victor."

"Nonsense or not," Victor retorted, "I can tell you that when a fellow feels that as soon as he opens his mouth he may be told he is n't wanted and sent about his business, it—well, it gives him a sinking sensation in the inside."

Mrs. Cantelupe strode across the room and rang the bell.

"Does it?" she said unsympathetically. "That must be very uncomfortable. Well, as far as you are concerned, you 'll have to get over that sinking sensation in the inside—now!"

"What on earth do you mean?" her nephew demanded, in sudden alarm.

A waiter's entry checked the answer. With one eye upon Victor Mrs. Cantelupe gave him his orders.

"Will you send up at once to Mrs. Massingberd—she is packing in her bedroom—and tell her I shall be extremely obliged, Mrs. Cantelupe will be extremely obliged, if she would spare me a few minutes down here. Say I am very sorry to disturb her, as I know she is busy, but it is a matter of importance and I shall not detain her long."

Captain Bretherton stood aghast, and then boiled. No man likes receiving downright and uncompromising orders from a woman, even if that woman be a determined aunt. As the waiter left the room he boiled over.

"I say, Aunt Emma," he began angrily, "this is a bit too much!"

But Mrs. Cantelupe was in no mood to make allowances for the easily-ruffled dignity of the male. She wheeled round on him excitedly.

"Now Victor, no shuffling! I 've given you your chance—your last chance—and I 'm now going out for a walk. When I come back I shall expect to hear that you have persuaded Mrs. Massingberd to stop on at Pontresina."

"Oh, hang it all," Bretherton spluttered, "you need n't have rushed me into it like this." He was excusably furious. Save by flight—a means too abject to be thought of—there was no escape from an immediate proposal. He desired to propose to Diana, certainly, but it is one thing to propose at your own time and place, and quite another to do so at the time and place selected by your aunt. But Mrs. Cantelupe swept his remonstrances scornfully aside.

"If I had n't rushed you into it, my dear boy, you 'd have let her go without a word —I know your way of putting things off until it is too late."

"But I should n't have let her go altogether," her nephew protested sulkily. "After all, I could have written to her— and, now I come to think of it, I believe I could have managed it ever so much better in a letter."

Mrs. Cantelupe looked withering contempt.

"My dear Victor, if you are laboring under the delusion that letter-writing is one of your strong points, all I can say is that you are most wofully mistaken. Besides, no woman respects a man who has n't pluck enough to tell her that he loves her to her face. Now make up your mind and take your courage in both hands —it won't be half so difficult as you think and you 'll muddle through somehow—

and, when once the ordeal is over, you will be extremely obliged to me for having forced it on you. I shall allow you half an hour—and at the end of that time I shall appear on the scene, armed with suitable congratulations."

And snatching up her parasol she whirled off through the window leaving her nephew gazing after her in disconsolate indignation, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he shared his aunt's comfortable certainty that the process of "muddling through" would be crowned with success and satisfaction. The sinking sensation to which he had alluded was making itself unpleasantly manifest; and he wondered, nervously, if there were any chance that Mrs. Massingberd, busy with her preparations for departure, might decline to come down.

Then the door opened and Diana walked in.

CHAPTER XI

SHE stopped short when she saw him and looked round sharply for Mrs. Cantelupe. This—the meeting and parting with Victor Bretherton—was exactly what she had hoped to avoid, exactly what she felt she could not bear.

"Is n't Mrs. Cantelupe here?" she asked. "I was told she wanted to see me."

Captain Bretherton cursed Mrs. Cantelupe in his heart and began to talk nonsense.

"Yes, she did. That 's to say she sent a message to you—I mean, she has just gone out for a walk."

His stammering speech, his flushed face, gave away the game. Diana understood and turned swiftly towards the door;

Bretherton's terror was as nothing to her's. She had so hoped to get away without seeing him—and now he was barring her way exactly as Sir Jabez had done a little while before.

"Don't go for a moment, Mrs. Massingberd. I 've something to say to you. I—I—" He had almost screwed himself up to the point and then his courage failed him and he swerved. "I hear you 're leaving us—going away."

Diana's throat was very dry but her voice was very even.

"Yes, I 'm going away. I find I must go back to London at once."

Captain Bretherton shifted from one foot to the other; the perspiration was standing on his forehead and he knew he was a miserable ass.

"I 'm awfully sorry—awfully."

"It 's very kind of you to say so."

How stony she was. Surely a woman

who cared for a man would give him a lift at such a moment—just a bit of encouragement to help him out. All she did was to look expectantly over his shoulder at the door as if waiting for him to move away—and if he could n't think of something to say he should have to move and let her pass. He could n't stand there much longer, tongue-tied and staring at her.

Something came at last—with a rush.

"We 've had a ripping time together, have n't we?"

He hoped she would respond—just a smile of thanks, a suggestion that she regretted that the "ripping time" was over, would have been a help. But no, her eyes were still on the door and her voice was still even and unshaken.

"Oh, I 've enjoyed it immensely."

How was a man to propose on the top of an emotionless remark like that? He

felt indignant with her and plunged on wretchedly.

"The walks round here are splendid, are n't they?"

This was too futile—he felt it himself. So did Diana. It was more than futile; it was painful and must be stopped. She held out her hand decidedly.

"I 'm afraid I really must go now, Captain Bretherton. I have to catch the quarter-past two at Samaden and the carriage will be round for me directly. Good-by."

"Good-by," he heard himself saying as he shook her hand; "I hope you 'll have an awfully comfortable journey and—"

Then he pulled himself up suddenly and the thing was done.

"Mrs. Massingberd—Diana—I—oh, hang it all, what does a fellow say when he wants the nicest woman in the world to marry him? Diana, do you think you

could manage to put up with me for a husband? I know I 'm an awful fool at putting things into words, but what I mean is, I 've never met a woman like you and—I love you—'pon my soul, I love you, Diana."

As he began to speak she had drawn her hand from his and shrunk back a pace or two; but when he came to the last words she lifted her eyes and looked straight up into his.

"Do you?" she said under her breath. He took it for a sign that he had muddled through and all was well.

"Diana," he cried with an eager step towards her, "does that mean—"

"No," she said sharply, "it does n't, it does n't. Wait!"

"Wait?" he repeated uneasily. "Diana, for heaven's sake, don't keep me in suspense! Just tell me one way or the other—let me know my fate in one word."

But Diana stood silent. There was a choice before her. She could give him a plain "no"—as she had every right to do—and leave him to nurse his wounded affection, sore but unenlightened. Or she could tell him the truth—and let him choose. Her pride told her that to do so would be useless—that it would mean humiliation and virtual rejection. But against her pride there fought a desperate little hope that she had not yet turned her back on happiness for ever—and the echo of his stammering "'pon my soul, I love you."

"Diana," he urged.

She drew a long breath and decided.

"I can't do that," she said. "I can't tell you in one word—yes or no—"

"You can't—why not?"

"Because—" She hesitated and then looked at him steadily. What was to fol-

low was to be a plain statement of fact; there should be no appeal to sentiment.

"Because—Captain Bretherton, you have just made me a proposal of marriage, for which I thank you. But, until you have heard what I have to say to you, I shall consider that proposal of marriage unspoken.

"Unspoken," Bretherton stammered, "but it is n't unspoken. What do you mean—I don't understand."

"Of course you don't understand yet: but I am going to make the position clear to you—"

"The position—what position?" he asked—noting, with uneasiness, that her face was pale and her eyes bright and restless. She pointed to a chair a little way from the sofa on which she had seated herself.

"Will you be good enough to sit down

there and listen to me for a few minutes?"

Puzzled and uncertain, Bretherton muttered something and sat down. Diana leaned back against the sofa-cushions and folded her hands in her lap: the plain statement of fact was coming.

"Do you realize, Captain Bretherton, that we have only been acquaintances for a little over a fortnight—to be exact, for seventeen days?"

Bretherton took courage.

"I feel," he said emphatically, "as if we had been friends for seventeen years."

Diana did not respond to the interruption; she took up her sentence exactly where she had left it off.

"And you really know practically nothing about me—nothing, I mean, of my life and history before I met you here less than three weeks ago."

Bretherton's eyes opened widely and he shifted in his chair. To say the least of

it, the words had given him a shock, they hinted at possibilities—unpleasant possibilities. They were so unpleasant that he felt ashamed of himself for connecting them, for an instant, with Diana.

"Er—no," he said awkwardly, "of course not. Except what you have told me yourself."

Diana's head went back against the cushions and she raised her hands and gently pressed the finger-tips together.

"Let me see," she said thoughtfully, "and what have I told you exactly?"

Captain Bretherton drew his hand across his forehead. The sense of bewilderment was deepening.

"Er—why," he stammered, "you 've told me—well, for one thing, you 've told me you 're the widow of—er—Mr. Josiah Massingberd."

"And that," said Diana, "was a lie to begin with."

There were five seconds of silence. This time Captain Bretherton did not fidget in his chair. On the contrary he sat quite still, asking himself if he had heard aright. He came to the conclusion that he had.

"Diana," he said, "Diana, what do you mean?"

"I mean, Captain Bretherton, that that estimable old gentleman, the late lamented Mr. Massingberd, is in the same position as Mrs. Harris—there never was no sich person. And, that being the case, he could n't very well have left a widow, could he?"

There was a red spot on each of her cheeks, now, and she had locked her fingers so that they should not shake; but her voice was composed and even flippant. She was keeping to her determination that there should be no pleading, no appeal for

sympathy. That would be to humiliate herself, indeed.

As yet there was no resentment in Bretherton's eyes—nothing but blank, incredulous amazement.

"What—on earth—are—you—saying?" he asked slowly with a pause between each word.

"That he could n't very well have left a widow," Diana repeated. "Nor, which is more to the point, perhaps, could he have bequeathed to his imaginary relict the very comfortable income of three thousand six hundred pounds a year."

"His imaginary relict," the young man echoed stupefied—and then a sudden light burst upon him. Diana, the mischievous, was taking a rise out of him—enjoying his stupefaction.

"I say—you 're joking!" he exclaimed hopefully.

But Diana's even voice cut through his hopes like a knife.

"I assure you I 'm not. I 'm in black and deadly earnest."

Again he stared at her, open-mouthed; and then—feeling it impossible not to believe her—he sprang to his feet.

"Then, if you are n't Diana Massingberd, who the deuce are you?" he cried; and, for the first time, she heard the note of anger and suspicion in his voice.

"Oh, I 'm Diana Massingberd right enough," she said quietly. "That 's my name—my legal and lawful name—and the only thing about me that is n't a snare and a delusion."

Again Bretherton's hand went to his forehead. The only thing he clearly understood was that somehow or other Diana was making a fool of him; and he was duly resentful.

"Am I mad or are you?" he demanded. Diana shrugged her shoulders.

"As far as I know, I 'm perfectly sane," she retorted. "All I 'm trying to do is to make you understand that instead of being a rich widow I 'm a poor spinster—a desperately poor spinster."

"But — then — how — ?" Bretherton stammered.

"I 've been taking you in, of course—you and all your friends—sailing under false colors. No doubt it was a disgraceful thing to do; but before you get really angry with me, as perhaps you are justified in doing, I 've a right to ask you to hear my story."

She was sitting bolt upright now and unlocked her fingers to point him back to the chair he had left. He took the hint in silence. She began rapidly and looking away from him.

"My father was a country doctor—an under-paid country doctor. When he died there was nothing—nothing at all—and I was thrown on my own resources for a living. I earned it how and where I could—and a little over a month ago I was a shop-assistant in London."

It was out now—the worst was out—and Bretherton was gazing at her with round, incredulous eyes.

"A shop-assistant—you!"

She nodded with a touch of defiance and went on:

"My last situation was at Dobson's, a big suburban draper's. I was in the hosiery department—"

"The—hosiery department," he repeated weakly. He felt as if his brain were reeling. The radiant Diana—the magnificent Mrs. Massingberd—handing stockings over a suburban counter? Im-

possible! Yet Diana's voice was going on, steadily, convincingly.

"—In the hosiery department, earning five shillings a week and having a hell of a time. I sha'n't apologize for the unparliamentary expression—it 's justified. I 'd had six years of that sort of slavery—been at it ever since my father died. Then, one night, I got a solicitor's letter telling me that a distant cousin of mine was dead and that I had come in for a legacy of three hundred pounds."

"Three hundred pounds!" Bretherton echoed her again in parrot-fashion; he had no words of his own at command.

"Yes," Diana nodded. "Of course, if I 'd been a sensible woman, I should have hoarded up my windfall—invested it in something safe and got two and a half or three per cent. on it. But I was n't sensible and I was sick of the starve and the

stint and the grind of it all—sick to death of the whole gray life; and so I settled to have a royal time while the money lasted. All the things that I'd wanted—wanted horribly and could n't have, just because I was poor—pretty dresses, travel, amusement, politeness and—yes, I don't mind confessing it, admiration—they should be mine while the cash held out."

She paused imperceptibly and turned her head to glance at him. His eyes were fixed on the carpet, his face downcast, sullen and perplexed. It was just what she had expected—but it hurt. She jerked up her head and a harder note came into her voice.

"I knew that I could buy them, every one—and I was n't wrong. I 've had my royal time. I 've been petted and admired and made much of and—made love to. Oh, only for the sake of my imaginary fortune, of course, but still I have en-

joyed the experience, enjoyed it down to the ground . . . And now it 's over and the money 's spent—and I 'm going back."

Bretherton raised his head quickly. Up to that moment he had only thought of what this meant to himself; for the first time he began to think of what it meant to her.

"Going back?" he repeated questioningly.

"To work—to the old life and the old grind. I 've just enough left out of my three hundred pounds to settle my hotel bill, tip the servants and pay for my ticket home. I expect I shall land in London practically 'broke to the wide.' "

"Good God!" Bretherton said.

She laughed a little defiantly. Of all things she least desired pity from him.

"Oh, my dresses will fetch something, of course. I shall have no further use

for smart frocks in that state of life to which it will please Providence to call me, and they ought to bring in enough for me to live on until I get something to do."

She heard her voice getting dry and jerky, and she broke off. Victor had risen and stood with his eyes upon the ground, his fingers twisting uncomfortably at his moustache. She waited, but he made no sign; her nerves were on edge and the silence grew too heavy for her to bear. It made her restless and she faced round on him at last, speaking quickly and digging her nails into the sofa-cushion.

"Well, now you know the whole story—and, having heard it, you are no doubt feeling very much obliged to me because I refused to allow you to commit yourself a few minutes ago?"

Bretherton flushed angrily. He was aggrieved and justly aggrieved; yet here was Diana, instead of expressing regret

for her duplicity, manœuvering him into a situation both unpleasant and ridiculous.

"You 've put me into a deuced awkward position," he said sullenly. "Deuced awkward!"

She quivered with anger and hurt pride that would have found an outlet in tears had she not fiercely choked them down. He had told her that he loved her—that he loved her upon his soul—and yet, when he heard that she was penniless, that she was going back to a life she had told him was hell, his sense of pity for her was swallowed up by his own hurt vanity and resentment at being placed in a "deuced awkward position." And for this she had humiliated herself; she shrugged her shoulders as much in self-contempt as in contempt for him.

"I assure you," she threw at him, "it 's just as awkward for me."

"You had no right—" Bretherton began

doggedly; but Diana, quicker of speech than he was, cut him short in an instant.

"No right to enjoy myself as I pleased and to play the fool with my own money! Are you so very scrupulous as to how you spend yours?"

The shot told and the captain's anger showed it.

"That 's not the point. You must see that it was most unfair to me—to all of us—to deceive us as to—as to your real position."

"In other words, as to the extent of my fortune," Diana mocked. Her fighting-blood was up, now, and being once entered in a quarrel, not even the hope of heaven could have stayed her hand.

"Then I am to understand that it was entirely to my imaginary three thousand six hundred a year that I owed all the attention and courtesy I have received from you during my stay here. I guessed as

much the day Mrs. Cantelupe tried to pump me about my resources."

Bretherton writhed indignantly. She was adding insult to injury; having stolen his affections, she jeered at them as worthless. Her position was utterly unjustifiable and he longed for her fluent powers of speech so that he might convince her of the fact.

"It 's all very well for you to talk like that," he blustered, "but surely you must realize that you have treated me shamefully—abominably—"

"In what way?" Diana inquired curtly.

"By deceiving me—by allowing me to suppose—" he floundered, and Diana, with deadly readiness, filled in the blank for him:

"That I was in a position to support a husband."

The neat, appropriate cruelty of the thrust took away his breath and left him

speechless. It was poisoned with truth—though not with truth undiluted. No, he was sure it was not the whole truth. She was bitterly unjust to him—and in his resentment his manners followed his temper.

"Oh, hang it all, I know I 'm no match for you in an argument. But, however much you may sneer and jeer at me, you must know perfectly well that your conduct has been that of an adventuress."

Diana was at white heat now. She had nothing to hope for—the breach between them was deadly, broad and final. She was reckless of everything but the momentary satisfaction of fighting a good fight; and, inwardly seething but outwardly calm, she rose to her feet and walked up to him deliberately.

"An adventuress, I think you said? Does n't that remind you a little of the celebrated interchange of compliments be-

tween the pot and the kettle? For, if I 'm an adventuress, what are you but an adventurer, Captain Victor Bretherton? You were ready and willing and anxious to run after me, so long as you believed I had money, and in the hope that I should allow you to live upon that money—"

"Diana—Mrs.—er, Miss Massingberd!" Bretherton stammered, his very fury confusing him. But it needed something more than an angry interjection to stay the flood of Miss Massingberd's wrath and contempt.

"It 's true and you know it," she flared tempestuously, "and is n't that the conduct of an adventurer? You 're far too extravagant to live on your own income—you 're far too idle to work to increase it—so you look round for a wife who is rich enough to support you in idleness and extravagance. You cannot dig—but to sponge on a wife you are not ashamed.

And what, may I ask, have you to offer the fortunate woman in return for the use of her superfluous income? Proprietary rights in a poor, backboneless creature who never did a useful thing in his life!"

Never in all his days had such a whirl of insults been flung at Bretherton's head. He stood aghast and then, as she paused for breath, broke in furiously—

"Miss Massingberd, this is insulting—intolerable!"

"Captain Bretherton, it may be insulting and intolerable, but it is also the truth. Common, vulgar people like me—people who work for their living instead of living on other people's work—have an awkward knack of calling a spade a spade at times. And remember," she finished, dropping suddenly and drily back to a conversational tone, "it was n't I who started calling names."

The torrent of her anger had exhausted

itself and she stood silent. Bretherton, sullen and smarting, did the same and for a moment nothing sounded in the room but the equable ticking of a clock. Diana was the first to speak—swiftly, coolly, indifferently.

"Well, good-by, Captain Bretherton. As I told you just now, my money is spent and my time here is up. I must hurry off to my room and finish packing all my earthly possessions in a couple of trunks and a hand-bag. Make my final adieux to Mrs. Cantelupe and tell her whatever you think fit."

Her hand was on the door when Victor's voice stopped her.

"Diana—Miss Massingberd."

She turned quickly, with a sudden unreasonable thrill of hope for she knew not what. His voice was sullen still but not bitter—almost apologetic. And—he did not want her to go.

"Yes!"

"Before you go," he stumbled, "I want you to see—I want to tell you that you have been very unjust to me."

"Unjust—how?"

"You cannot believe all that you have said about me. It was not only money—surely you see that. And surely you must know that I would give a great deal—a very great deal—if circumstances did not keep us apart."

She knew of what he was thinking—of the invisible barrier that, to her, did not exist, but to him was a ring-fence barred and bound with iron. Her eyebrows went up scornfully; there were so many things a man really could not do without placing an arbitrary limit to his powers.

"If," he stumbled on, reddening in the effort to explain the situation without wounding her feelings, "if it were not a—

a moral impossibility for a man in my position—"

He stopped, afraid to say more; and again Diana filled in the blank. The gulf of which she had always been conscious was open wide between them now—and she hit at him across it, pitilessly.

"If it were not a moral impossibility for a man in your position to marry a shop-girl! That 's what you mean, is n't it? A shop-girl—that is to say, a woman who has so far degraded herself as to work for her own living. Believe me, I quite realize the impossibility of the thing from your point of view; only, for the life of me, I cannot understand how you and your like can have the impertinence to look down on me and mine. When you thought I had married an old man for his money, you considered that I had acted in a seemly and womanly manner; when you learn

that, instead of selling myself in the marriage market, I have worked for my living honestly, you consider me—impossible. And yet I have done for half a dozen years what you *could n't* do for half a dozen months."

"And what 's that?" Bretherton snapped.

"Earned my bread, of course—without being beholden to any man and without a penny at my back. I wonder if it has ever entered into your head to ask yourself what use the world would have for you if you had n't got money enough with which to pay your way!"

All the scorn of years was in her voice —the bitterness, the resentment of one who had learned, in anger and in tears, that the crime of crimes is poverty, and flesh and blood cheaper to buy than dirt. But Bretherton, not understanding,

thought the scorn was aimed at him alone.

"No, it has n't," he retorted, angry and insulted.

"Well, it 's a question that you might turn over in your own mind with considerable advantage to your moral character. Personally, I fancy that you would find the answer to be that the world had no use for you at all."

The cool, insulting certainty of her manner left him aghast and furious, the more so because, though the voice was the voice of Diana Massingberd, the words were an unpleasant echo of Sir Jabez Grinlay.

"Upon my word," he spluttered.

"If you don't believe me," she retorted, "you have only to try the experiment for yourself. Stand with your back against the wall, as I 've stood for the last six years, and fight the world on your own hand! You simply could n't do it—

you 'd throw up the sponge in a week."

"Do you take me for an absolute fool, then?" he demanded wrathfully.

"No, but I take you for a man brought up in sloth and self-indulgence and therefore incapable of putting your shoulder to the wheel—and incapable of seeing life as it really is. Your view of life is—must be—false and artificial. What is the meaning to people like you of the words, 'If a man will not work, neither shall he eat?' Nothing—just nothing! They have no meaning to you. You don't understand them—and how could you?"

Her eyes blazed and every word hit its mark and stung as she launched it at him —across the gulf.

"Hang it all," he cried furiously, "if I 'm such a hopeless ass and idiot as you make out, I wonder you 've ever had anything at all to do with me?"

It was a random blow—but it counted

to him all the same. Her face went suddenly white and the leaping fire of scorn died down in her eyes and grew dim.

"It would have been very much better for me," she said, "if I never had."

Then she turned quickly from him and the door closed behind her.

CHAPTER XII

DIANA went straight up to her room and finished her packing. She locked the doors while she packed; it struck her that Mrs. Cantelupe, on learning the truth from her nephew, might pursue her with reproaches even into the fastness of her bedroom. And she was in no mood to see, or wrangle with, Mrs. Cantelupe or anyone else. She was exhausted, broken, done; her face ached with the efforts she had made to keep herself from crying and she shook from head to foot.

She had very little time to spare, and was only just ready when the chambermaid knocked at the door to ask her if the porter should carry down her trunks.

She stood miserably watching the man as he hoisted them upon his shoulders; she had worn her finery for the last time. Exit Mrs. Massingberd of Pontresina and re-enter Diana the drudge. She pulled her veil down over her face and hurried downstairs to the waiting carriage, afraid of meeting someone she knew, afraid above all of meeting Mrs. Cantelupe. But no one was in the hall except servants, expectant of tips, and Herr Ritter, smiling his good-bys and hoping to see Mrs. Massingberd another year. She choked down an outburst of hysterical laughter and told the driver to be quick. It was the same man who had driven her to the hotel from Samaden station less than three weeks ago; and, with an ache at her heart that was almost intolerable, she remembered the delight of that drive.

The journey homewards always remained in her memory as a nightmare.

She would have given worlds to be alone, so that she might just lie and tremble with misery and sob when the need came on her; but her second-class carriage—a first was beyond her means now—was crowded, and she had to sit stiff, upright and mindful of the eyes of her companions. She dared not look out of the window at the mountains that were slipping away from her and going out of her life; she kept her eyes fixed on the luggage-rack opposite while the hum of the wheels beat a rackety measure inside her aching head.

It was over now—all over. For her the world where you did what you liked, and not what you had to, had ceased to exist. She had seen it and known it, despised it and enjoyed it—but its gates, now, were closed to her for ever.

At Basle she changed into the through carriage for Boulogne and then came the long night-journey, black and sleepless.

Still, if she could have had her way it would have been longer and slower; it was the journey's end she dreaded, the beginning again of the old life; and she hated to think that every yard covered by the rolling wheels was bringing her nearer to that. She never closed her eyes, but sat in the half-darkness cast by the shaded lamp while her huddled companions swayed to and fro with the motion of the train in various stages of sleepiness. She wondered idly what Victor had been doing since she left—whether he had worked off his wrath and indignation by a strenuous afternoon on the links, or whether he had sufficiently recovered to join Mrs. Whyte-Fraser's donkey-party. Of one thing she was quite sure: Mrs. Whyte-Fraser and her intimates would never know the true inwardness of the Massingberd episode. They would never be allowed to learn that Captain the Honour-

able Victor Bretherton had made himself ridiculous by dancing attendance on a shop-girl out for a holiday.

It was a long time—not till the train was rumbling through France in the gray of the early morning—before she ever thought of Sir Jabez Grinlay, so completely had her encounter with Victor driven every other consideration from her mind. Then, with something of a shock, she told herself that, after all, the drying-up of her own funds need not necessarily have meant her expulsion from the world that called itself by that name; had she accepted Sir Jabez for better or worse, things might have been different. Even with that painfully lean purse of hers between her fingers she could not find it in her heart to wish that she had given another answer to her former tyrant; but she did find herself wondering at her own courage and disinterestedness in refusing

him so promptly and decidedly. So far as she could remember, she had not hesitated for an instant over his offer; and she smiled a little bitterly as she realized why it was that she had been so certain and uncompromising. She had had no hope of Victor when she gave the baronet his blank, unqualified refusal; but she had had no heart to give to any other man. If she had never met Victor, she wondered, should she have been tempted into an acceptance? and what would Sir Jabez's attitude have been when the truth was confessed to him? Would his affection have stood the test under which Captain Bretherton had so lamentably broken down? Perhaps not; but at any rate he had not proposed to her for her money—having plenty of his own.

At Amiens, she caught sight of the towers of the cathedral and turned away her head; she remembered with what a thrill of delight she had leaned out of the win-

dow to look at them on her journey to Paris, less than a month ago. Then came Boulogne and the boat and the unwelcome sea that was all that separated her now from England and what England meant to her. It was a dull gray sea with dull clouds overhead and a drizzling rain from them blotting out the distance; in everything, even in the weather, the ending of her travels was a contrast to their beginning. At Folkestone she ensconced herself in the corner of a second-class carriage and from sheer weariness of mind and body dozed till the train rolled into Charing Cross.

With regard to the future her plans were necessarily simple, of her funds there remained but a shilling or two in hard cash; her clothes would have to be turned into money on the morrow. For that night she intended to leave her boxes at the station and make for some cheap lodg-

ings on the Surrey side where she had stayed once or twice when out of work. The landlady knew her well and, if her rooms were full, would recommend another place. Then would begin the search for work—which meant the means to live.

She stepped out upon the familiar platform with a deadly sense of being at home again. Paris, Pontresina, the high pure Alps with the fir-trees climbing up their sides, the laughter, the music and the admiration—they had all been but the baseless fabric of a vision which, for a time, had passed before the forbidding face of London and the realities of life.

The porter who took her boxes to the cloak-room and inquired whether he should call her a cab, waited expectantly for a tip. She felt in her pocket for coppers and having none, gave him a sixpence—purchasing, with almost the last poor remnant of her fortune, a "Thank

you, ma'am," and the touch of a peaked cap.

Then she walked out of the station, into the Strand; and London swallowed her up.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR fully two minutes after the door of Number Eleven had closed on Diana Massingberd, Captain Bretherton stood where she had left him, amazed, indignant, overwhelmed. Then he drew a long breath and looked around; his eye lighted on the bell; he rang it and ordered a whiskey-and-soda.

After that he felt better—decidedly better. Not, however, by any means himself. His sensations were those of a man who has made acquaintance with an earthquake in an unexpected place—say Kensington High Street or Pall Mall. It would have been shock enough to discover that the woman he had thought of marrying was of a class whence men of his own

do not take their wives; but that had not been all. The shop-girl had turned and rent him on the score of his inferiority to herself. And a good deal of what she had said had sounded amazingly true—though of course it was not! It was downright ridiculous of her, as it was downright ridiculous of Sir Jabez Grinlay to take it for granted that because he habitually wore clean collars and kept his nails trimmed he was not worth his salt; that was just the unreasonable, superficial idea that the lower orders were apt to get into their heads. It was class prejudice—nothing more—and rot at that! She must have known that all the time. She simply had gone for him like a fury because she felt she was utterly in the wrong and that there was no excuse to be made for herself.

He paced angrily up and down the room and was just on the point of ordering a

second whiskey-and-soda to soothe his ruffled spirits, when it flashed into his mind that the half hour of which Mrs. Cantelupe had spoken must be up and that, at any moment, his aunt might be upon him. And he felt that an explanatory interview with Mrs. Cantelupe was rather more than he could bear at that juncture; he must have time to think over what he was going to say to her, to decide exactly how far she was to be let into the secret of Diana's masquerade, how far he would reveal what a fool she had made of him. He snatched up his cap from the table and darted out of the window.

He made his escape only just in time. As he glanced round from the verandah he caught sight of his aunt's familiar parasol less than a hundred yards away and, hoping she had not seen him, he hurried round the corner of the house and sped up the hill-path. He walked rapidly and

angrily; so much so that he was soon out of breath. He sat down on a boulder, lighted a cigarette and began to think of all the things that he ought to have said to Diana—and had n't. Her point of view was ridiculous, of course, and, if he had been smarter, he could have proved it to her. He wished he had been smarter; as it was, she would go away feeling that she had completely worsted him and that her position was unassailable—persuading herself, it might be, that he was the hopeless idiot she had tried to make him out. It was the latter reflection that galled.

As he stared down gloomily into the valley a carriage that, at that distance, seemed to crawl, came into sight on the Samaden road. He sat staring at it, wondering if it was Diana's; and then, with a flash, he realized what he had failed to realize before—that he had seen Diana

for the last time. He looked after the carriage without moving till his cigarette burned his fingers and he threw it away. When the carriage had disappeared round a bend in the hill, he got up and walked rapidly for a mile or so—and found he was on the same path which he had trodden with Diana on the day she arrived at Pontresina. A little farther along was the châlet where they had had coffee and watched the sunset together: he turned savagely and took another path. He scrambled on recklessly and then, breathless again, seated himself with his back against a fir-tree and the sweep of the valley below him; he was not very sensitive to nature or its beauties but somehow the calm and majesty of the place was comforting. Then from the distance—away to the left—came a screech, dulled by distance, and a puff of white smoke and a diminutive caterpillar

of a train crawled out of Samaden on its way to Coire and Zurich. Diana's train.

"I 'll leave the beastly place," he muttered half-aloud. "I 've had enough of it."

After all, that would be the best thing to do. With a kind of sick and angry resentment, he admitted that he should hate Pontresina, now that Diana was gone. She had treated him badly and she was a shop-girl; but she had left him in no mood for dances and donkey-parties. And if he was going he might as well go at once, walk to Samaden and take the first train to somewhere—it did n't much matter where—and send a wire to Mrs. Cantelupe telling her to forward his baggage. One advantage of such a course would be that the explanatory interview with his aunt would be avoided, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Having decided on flight, he rose and swung downwards towards the Samaden road and, a little way from it (and to his intense disgust), overtook Major Whyte-Fraser. The major greeted him cheerfully and, with his constitutional incapacity for discovering when he was not wanted, proceeded to walk by his side; and it was not until Victor had explained, with curt impatience, that he was not going to make one of the afternoon donkey-party that it dawned upon his companion that Bretherton was looking a bit off.

"Anything wrong?" he inquired.

Victor flushed angrily.

"Wrong—with me, do you mean? No, what should be wrong?" he returned not too politely.

Major Whyte-Fraser apologized.

"Oh, nothin'—sorry. Thought you were n't lookin' quite up to the mark.

Sorry you are n't comin' this afternoon. I suppose the fair Diana will turn up? She 'll miss you."

"Mrs. Massingberd has left Pontresina," Bretherton returned stiffly—and then wished he had held his tongue.

Major Whyte-Fraser had not seen his wife since breakfast and Diana's departure was news to him. His face showed that he connected it immediately with his companion's appearance of being below the mark, and Bretherton felt a strong desire to knock him down. Instead he walked on by his side in silence—there being no chance of getting rid of the stolid Whyte-Fraser till they reached a fork in the path.

And then suddenly an impulse—the impulse to appeal against outsiders, to one of his own class—made Bretherton turn to his companion.

"I say, Whyte-Fraser, I want to ask you

something. Supposing that I were left without a single penny in the world—"

The major was startled out of his equanimity and almost dropped his cigar.

"God bless my soul, my dear fellow, you surely don't mean—?"

"No, I don't," Bretherton interrupted him. "My money—what there is of it—is all right. Tied up—trustees and that sort of thing—I could n't get at it if I wanted to. This is only a supposition."

Major Whyte-Fraser breathed freely again.

"That 's all right. Go on."

Victor went on—slowly and looking straight before him and ashamed of himself for putting the question at all.

"Well, then, supposing I were left without a single penny and had to turn to, as lots of other people have to, without help of any kind, does it strike you that I 'm the sort of man who could manage

to make his own way in the world and, in short, earn his own living off his own bat?"

Major Whyte-Fraser looked at him in amiable astonishment,

"You, my dear chap?" he said. "Good Lord, no!"

They had reached the spot where the path forked, and Bretherton nodded and left him without a word.

In due course Mrs. Cantelupe received a wire, handed in at Samaden, stating that her nephew was on his way to Zurich and requesting her to forward his luggage by the next train. She complied, accompanying the luggage by a letter reproaching him for his flight. Of course she had known, she wrote, that things had gone wrong when she returned from her walk and found her nephew had vanished and Mrs. Massingberd retired to her room

to pack (the latter piece of information she had gleaned from a chambermaid). But, naturally, she desired to know more; she thought that Victor ought to have felt it due to her to tell her exactly what had taken place. She made every allowance for his trying situation; but surely he might have shown some small consideration for her suspense and anxiety! Was she to understand that Mrs. Massingberd's refusal of him was definite and final—that she declined to give him any hope whatever? If that was the case she —Mrs. Cantelupe—could not understand it; she could only say that Mrs. Massingberd had acted shamefully in encouraging Victor as she had done. But, in spite of appearances, she could not help hoping that things were not as bad as they seemed, that perhaps it was nothing but a temporary misunderstanding which had come between two people whom she be-

lieved to be in every respect suited to each other. If that was the case, and there was anything she could do, would Victor write at once (underlined) and tell her everything (also underlined). Also to be sure not to forget to let her know Mrs. Massingberd's address; she had stupidly forgotten to ask her, etc., etc.

Captain Bretherton's answer to his aunt's three-sheet effusion was decisive, if unsatisfactory. It was all over between himself and Mrs. Massingberd; he did not know her address; neither did he know what his own would be for the present. He was leaving Zurich next morning but had not yet made up his mind as to his destination. And with that Mrs. Cantelupe had, perforce, to be content.

Having dispatched his letter, Captain Bretherton walked about the environs of Zurich; spent an hour or two on a lake steamboat; and finally returned to his hotel

feeling as if the bottom had been knocked out of his life. He disliked the sensation extremely. The evening was wet and he spent it in the hotel smoking-room, listening to the cosmopolitan chatter around him and trying to make up his mind where he should go next day. Suppose he went back to England? Raynesworth would put him up for a bit and give him some shooting. That would take his thoughts away from . . .

He began to think of her, of course—steadily. Staring down at the time-table on his knees, he wondered what she was doing. She was back in London by now—had arrived some hours ago. To-morrow she would begin to look for work; being "broke to the wide" she would have to look for it and look speedily. Suppose she had any difficulty in finding it? He put the uncomfortable thought aside. It was not likely; she knew the ropes and

had plenty of brains; it was not in the least likely. And besides, she had said that her dresses would fetch something, a few pounds, to go on with . . .

He moved uneasily in his chair. There was no doubt of her pluck. After all she had some right to be proud of herself for fighting the world on her own hand—for six years and without a penny at her back. He found himself suddenly wondering what it felt like to be without a penny—absolutely without a single penny. He had been "broke" scores of times; but that was quite another thing to having no money in your pocket. Of course there were heaps of people who had no money—the unemployed and the people who got poor relief out of the rates; he had always pitied these vaguely, but had always felt, too, that they were of a different mold from that in which his own class was cast, less proud, less sensitive, uneducated and

of an altogether coarser breed, accustomed to squalor and liking it. Many of them drank, too, and did n't want work when they found it—so he understood. But Diana was certainly not of these. She was used to squalor, perhaps, but she certainly did not like it; as far as pride went, she was at least his equal. She fell short in no single particular of what was best in his own class; it was impossible to think of her as coarser and less sensitive—and it was horrible to think of her without a penny. But after all, why should he assume that she would ever be without one? She had managed to earn her own living for six years. She would go on earning it all right.

The echo of her contemptuous words floated through his brain.

"I have done for half a dozen years what you *could n't* do for half a dozen months: earned my bread."

Again he stirred uneasily; then slammed the book upon his knee and flung it on the nearest table. What right had she to assume that he was not able to do a man's work in the world? And what right had that impertinent brute of a Grinlay and that ass of a Whyte-Fraser to assume the same thing? Was there something about him that gave the false impression that he was a spoon-fed incapable? The work that had come in his way he had always done well enough. There had been nothing against him in the Guards; the men had liked him and thought him a good officer. It was not his fault that nothing in the nature of serious effort had ever been demanded of him, that he could point to nothing of achievement in his life. What had there been for him to achieve? He only wished there had been something. He felt, in all honesty, that, given the opportunity, he would have proved his met-

tle and shown himself at least a man—not the mere useless idler of Diana Massingberd's denunciation. It was not his own doing but sheer hard luck that the circumstances of his life had never permitted of such an opportunity. Perhaps they never would.

Once again the memory of her scornful words echoed tauntingly in his ear.

"If you don't believe me, you have only to try the experiment for yourself. Stand with your back against the wall as I 've stood for the last six years, and fight the world on your own hand. You simply could n't do it—you 'd throw up the sponge in a week."

That, at least, she had no right to say—that, at least, he could prove wrong! And he would. By heaven, he would!

He rose with a suddenness that caused a neighboring bulky German to start and stare after him as he strode out of the

room. He had not realized how keenly the doubts cast upon his own manliness had stung and wounded him until he had resolved to prove them false and unfounded. How he was going to do so he did not know as yet, but it was clear to him that his own self-respect demanded that he should give them the lie. He should never see Diana again—he cared nothing for Sir Jabez or Whyte-Fraser—but for his own satisfaction, for the sake of his own self-esteem, he could not sit down under the accusation that he was a parasite without pluck, a powerless, unwanted fool. The pride of race in him forbade the belief that he was not the physical and mental equal of men who toiled and fought without the aid of unearned increment; he believed in blood and the courage of blood—and in the obligation laid on those who possess it not to shirk in a tight place and to keep on till

they drop. It was the aristocratic instinct within him—the sense of "noblesse oblige"—that told him Diana was wrong when she said he would throw up the sponge in a week. He might fail—yes; but *that* he knew he could not do. It was against nature and training, and, therefore, unthinkable.

He went up to his room, having given orders that he was to be called in time to catch the early train to Basle, but it was a long time before he slept. He had to think how his decision was to be carried out—and so very little to go upon when it came to forming plans. It was one thing to decide to stand with your back to the wall and fight the world on your own hand, another thing to set about doing it. He was to get work, he was to do without his income for six months. Diana had fixed the terms for him. "I have done for half a dozen years what

you could n't do for half a dozen months," she had said. But what was the work to be and how was it to be obtained? That remained to be seen, but what others had done he could do. On that point he was very certain and determined.

He left Zurich in the early morning with a curious sense of adventure and excitement. He was about to make for himself a place in the world, about to battle with life, having cast aside every weapon that birth and fortune had given him, about to prove himself a man among men by his own unaided efforts. Somewhere in the back of his mind was the unacknowledged hope that some day Diana would know. It was unlikely that they would ever meet again, though stranger things had happened; but if they ever did meet again he would have to make it clear to her that it was for the sake of his own self-respect and not just in order to right

himself in her eyes that he had resolved upon the step he was now taking. He insisted to himself upon that view of the situation.

He had wired from Zurich that he was to be expected at his London rooms, and by midnight he was at home. When he had finished supper he sat down and wrote a letter to Mrs. Cantelupe; it ran as follows:

"Dear Aunt Emma: As you will see by my address I am back in London but I don't intend stopping — I shall move on somewhere else to-morrow. I have n't made up my mind where I am going yet, but the fact is I feel I should rather be alone for a bit, so don't be surprised or alarmed if you don't hear anything of me for some time. Also, it will be no good writing to me as I sha'n't give Stephens my address, so letters won't be forwarded. You need n't worry about me — I 'm all right. When you 're writing to Raynesworth and the others you might let them know I 'm away and it 's no good writ-

ing for the present. Will let you know when I come back. Kind regards to Mrs. Whyte-Fraser. Your affectionate nephew, VICTOR."

He closed the letter, stamped it and looked round the room, wondering what sort of quarters he would be in to-morrow night. To a certain extent he had matured his plans, but he had not yet settled definitely what form his work for a living was to take. He knew something about motors, a good deal about horses, and he hoped and believed that his knowledge would prove marketable. But, at first, at any rate, he would take whatever turned up; he would abide strictly by the rules of the game, and nothing that would bring him in his daily bread should be beneath him.

Stephens had left the morning's paper upon the writing-table; he opened it and turned to the advertisements with a sudden, interested desire to see how men

without money and influence earned their bread in the open market. Perhaps there would be something for which he could apply; and he ran his finger down the column, with a growing sense of bewilderment. Certainly it was a true saying that one-half of the world does not know how the other half lives. A good proportion of the announcements were mysterious to him. What, for instance, was the work of a "boot clicker," used to bespoke cutting? Of a "hair-pin hand in the brush trade," or a "brilliant letter-fixer?" and why did butchers want good scalesmen and young men who were used to "dressing smalls?" There was nothing about horses or motors, and he tossed the paper aside and went up to bed.

He went out directly after breakfast; made for Westminster Bridge and crossed it. He had an idea that somewhere in the mean streets that lay beyond it he

should come across what he wanted—working-clothes. He bought a cheap suit—he had never imagined that suits could be bought so cheap—had it wrapped in brown paper and carried it home in a cab. He arrayed himself in it, not without repulsion, put on his thickest boots and selected a tweed cap; and in the brown paper that had enwrapped his new garments he put a change of linen and tied the parcel up with string.

There remained the question of how much money he was to take with him. In the first flush of his enthusiasm he had said "without a penny at my back," but, now that the plunge was so near, he hesitated. Wages were not always paid in advance, he knew; he might have to work and live for a day or two—perhaps a week—before he actually fingered coins that he had earned. He meditated uncertainly and then, with some misgivings as to his

honesty, slipped a sovereign into his pocket.

"I won't touch it if I can help it," he told himself.

It only remained to start. He had sent Stephens out on an errand, so that the man should not see him in his new and strange array, and had already written him a note, which he stuck up against the looking-glass, to the effect that he had been called away and need not be expected back. He walked to the head of the stairs and looked down; no one was about and he tucked his brown paper parcel under his arm, ran downstairs and opened the hall door. He glanced nervously up and down the street and walked quickly away, with his face to the east.

And then, in his turn, London swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH his footsteps shod with silence Police-Constable Fellowes of the C Division walked the Embankment and surveyed the river with unimaginative eyes. The season was November and the hour was three o'clock in the morning; there was only enough fog to blur the river lamps with mystery and make cloud-capped towers of the Cecil and Savoy. Below the parapet the tide was running strongly, sucking and lapping at the steamboat piers, the only thing, save Police-Constable Fellowes, that was not given over to utter sleep.

Under the glow of one of the lamps Fellowes stopped and, for the edification of

his superiors, made a laborious entry with a pencil in his note-book. The entry completed to his satisfaction, he returned the note-book to his pocket, beat his cold hands together vigorously and, shod with silence, resumed his majestic walk. The Clock Tower loomed up vaguely wonderful out of the darkness, and he sighed, remembering how long it was till breakfast-time should come round.

Suddenly he halted and surveyed, with disapproving eyes, one of the Embankment seats. It had been empty when he last had passed that way; now it was occupied by no less than three huddled figures—two men and a woman who had taken advantage of his absence to snatch such sleep as might be snatched on a raw November night. Fellowes approached them with stealthy ponderosity; the ponderosity was his own and the stealthiness an attribute of his boots. He put out a

hand and shook one of the sleepers, not ungently, by the arm.

"Now, then, wake up—wake up, d'you hear. This 'ere seat ain't a doss-'ous—you 've got to move on."

The man—elderly, bent and blear-eyed—rose unresistingly and, without word of protest or resentment, shambled off into the night whence he had come and where he belonged. The other two, as yet untouched, slept on. Fellowes left the crumpled old woman till the last and shook the man, who growled. Fellowes repeated his remark anent the doss-house—it was his usual formula for these occasions—and the man growled again and sullenly burrowed his face into the arm he had flung along the back of the seat. Fellowes, albeit by nature inclined to mercy, felt that more stringent measures were called for, and began to drag the refractory loafer off the seat.

"I suppose you 're not deaf, are you?" he remarked sarcastically. "I 've been tellin' you to move on for the last five minutes. Now, up you get."

The man got up—or rather Fellowes got him up. Being up, he shook himself free of the constable's hand, angrily.

"Why on earth can 't you let me alone?" he snarled. "What harm was I doing I should like to know—are n't these seats made to sit down on? This moving on of poor, homeless devils is a perfectly inhuman practice—a disgrace to civilization."

Fellowes was not a particularly observant man, but he knew a gentleman's voice when he heard it. Being a policeman, he was not particularly surprised; it was by no means the first time that he had met a well-bred accent keeping company with rags. All the same his eyes endeavored to scan the face under the battered cap,

and his tone was a shade less surly and imperative as he made answer.

"Can't help that—it's our orders. Now, then, on you go—quick, march."

The man turned with a sudden lift of the shoulders and a muttered curse—and the blurred glow of the river lamp fell on the face beneath the battered cap. The constable caught his breath in an astonished gasp.

"Captain Bretherton! It's never you, sir—I beg your pardon, sir. I'm sure I—"

The loafer swung round sharply on his down-trodden heels—astonished and by no means pleased.

"Why, who the deuce—?" he asked sharply.

Fellowes explained. "Don't you remember me, sir? I served in the Welsh Guards afore I got my discharge and joined the force. And in your company,

sir—B Company. Private Fellowes."

His manner was stolid, grieved, respectful—gravely resentful of his officer's downfall. Victor felt a sudden rush of gratitude to him for the use of the once familiar "sir." It was a petty thing to find pleasure in—but it brought with it an echo of the old sense of superiority, self-confidence, and command. Unconsciously he straightened himself in his ragged clothes, ceased to slouch and spoke from the station in life to which Fellowes' deference had restored him.

"Why, of course, I remember you, Fellowes—did n't recognize you in that get-up, though. Glad to see you—that 's to say, I hope you 're doing well?"

"Yes, sir, thanks, I 'm doin' fairly well." His eyes traveled over his former officer's garments with respectful sympathy in their gaze, and he coughed regretfully. "I—I 'm afraid you 're not, sir."

Bretherton looked down at the frayed edge of his tattered coat, at his trousers, torn and bagging at the knees, at his boots, caked with mud, the uppers breaking away from the soles, and smiled grimly.

"It does n't seem very like it, does it?"

Again the constable's sympathetic eyes surveyed him from tattered cap to battered heel; and again he coughed respectfully.

"I 'm sorry to see you like this, sir—so redooced in circumstances. I am, indeed, sir."

"Thank you," Bretherton nodded. He had been resentful enough at first when Fellowes recognized him; now he was glad of the man's company. It was something to be treated as a human being again and not as a derelict, an out-of-work, a thing to be pitied, patronized or kicked. Fellowes pitied him, of course;

but in the right way, in a spirit of good comradeship and respect. His stolid, unemotional sympathy was not only tolerable but grateful, and the policeman's next words were as balm in Gilead to his sore and humbled self-esteem.

"We all liked you in the rig'ment, sir; there was n't an officer as the men thought more off—that there was n't."

Bretherton could have gripped him by his big, gloved hand as he stood hesitating how to go on.

"And if there was anything—anything at all as I could do, sir—"

Bretherton understood what was coming, and hastened to give the constable's thoughts another direction.

"Well, if it would n't get you into any very serious trouble with your superiors, perhaps you 'd let me resume my seat for a bit. May I? Thanks."

He seated himself at one end of the

bench. Farther along it a humped shawl and bonnet occasionally stirred and, less occasionally, snored. The wearer of the shawl and bonnet had learned to sleep when and how she could, and to rouse herself only when the Arm of the Law was laid on her shoulder. When it was so laid, she, too, would go off into the night where she belonged; meanwhile she dozed unbeautifully. For the present Fellowes left her unmolested, his mind being occupied with other things.

"And—Fellowes?" Bretherton said, hungrily.

"Yes, sir?"

"I suppose you 've not got a morsel—just a morsel of tobacco about you?"

Fellowes dived into his pocket and produced a pouch.

"I have, sir; but I 'm afraid it 's not quite the sort you 're used to, sir." Fellowes remembered his captain's ha-

vanas, and the price his captain used to pay for them.

"You 're quite right," Bretherton nodded, "it 's not the sort I 'm used to, because I 've got out of the way of being used to any form of tobacco. Ah!" with a sigh of satisfaction he filled a battered clay pipe, lighted it and sucked at it, "that 's good! Three days since I had a whiff of the blessed stuff—three mortal days."

"You don't say so, sir," Fellowes sympathized.

"I do." He puffed out a cloud of the rank smoke with infinite satisfaction. "Cash has n't run to it, Fellowes. Do you know what my total takings have been for the last twenty-four hours? Threepence halfpenny. And the halfpenny was a Frenchman."

The estimable Fellowes shook his helmeted head in silent dismay. He had al-

ways known that Captain Bretherton was a bit too free with his money; but he had never imagined that a young man with his connections, and the son of a viscount to boot, would be allowed to find his way to the lower depths where food was scarce and tobacco an unattainable luxury.

"It 's a bad job," he said at length. " 'Eavy financial losses, I suppose, sir?"

What with Fellowes' respectful sympathy and Fellowes' inferior tobacco, Bretherton's spirits had risen distinctly. He had found a friend; and the night was a little less dark, the air a little less raw, the world in general less contemptuously bleak. His answer was almost cheerful.

"Why, not exactly—light financial gains would be a bit nearer the mark."

"Beg pardon, sir?" Fellowes queried.

Bretherton hesitated, and then decided on making a clean breast of it. It was so good to talk; besides it was possible that

Fellowes might put him in the right way to obtain that place in the work-a-day world for which, during three long months, he had sought, and sought in vain.

"The truth is, Fellowes," he said, "that I 'm not quite so badly off as I look."

"I 'm very glad to 'ear it, sir," the constable returned in a tone that betrayed his firm conviction that his companion might be a great deal better off than he looked, and still be far from sound financially. "But, if that 's the case, sir—"

"If that 's the case, why am I masquerading on the Embankment in garments only fit for a door-heap, eh? Well—" he hesitated, puffed out another cloud of smoke, and then went on slowly —"it 's on account of what you might call a challenge."

"A challenge, sir?" Fellowes repeated in stolid non-comprehension.

"Yes, a challenge. What you might call a—sort of a bet."

It took a good deal to surprise Police-Constable Fellowes, but Bretherton had done the trick twice that night—this time so completely that it was a moment or two before the constable found words wherewith to clothe his amazement.

"You 're walking about the Embankment, in them boots, on account of a bet, sir?"

"A sort of a bet," Bretherton repeated.

"If I was you, sir," the constable advised firmly, "I should stick to the 'orses."

Bretherton laughed a little drearily.

"I think I will, Fellowes—after next February."

"After next February, sir?" Fellowes repeated questioningly.

"Yes," Bretherton nodded doggedly,

with his teeth shut on the pipe-stem. "I 've got to go on with this sort of thing till then."

This time Fellowes was not only amazed; he was seriously concerned.

"You 've got to go on sleeping out till next February, sir? Why, you 'll never stand it—these 'ere cold nights 'll be the death of you."

"Oh, you need n't think I always sleep out," Bretherton answered him hastily. "When I 've got the necessary twopence I patronize a doss-house."

Fellowes began to feel doubts—very considerable doubts—as to his former officer's sanity.

"But what 's the hobject of it all, sir?" he remonstrated. "What 's the hobject of sleeping out on one of these 'ard seats or even in a twopenny doss when you 've got a comfortable 'ome of your own waiting for you?"

For the first time for many weeks Bretherton was amused; the policeman's stolid perplexity appealed to his sense of humor.

"The object of it all, Fellowes, is simply this: To discover whether or not I am capable of earning my own living by the work of my own unaided hands—and brains—for the space of six calendar months."

Fellowes reflected—allowed the words to sink into his brain, and then remarked tersely:

"Well, I 'm damned!"

"I suppose," Bretherton went on with a shrug of his shoulders, "that you can 't give me any tip on how to manage it? The smallest contribution in the way of a suggestion will be thankfully received. Tell me, how on earth does a man set about earning a living? I don't mean a chap who has been at a Board School

and has a trade at his fingers' ends, but a man who has scrambled through Eton and Oxford and had practically no education at all?"

It was the first time Police-Constable Fellowes had ever been consulted with regard to the career of a gentleman who had had the advantages of a public school and university training. He gave Bretherton's question a full minute's earnest consideration, but could find nothing more enlightening to say than:

"I suppose 'is friends usually gets 'im some sort of a berth, don't they, sir?"

The suggestion was accurate, as far as it went, but scarcely of use to Bretherton.

"But if he has n't got any friends?" he urged. "If he has to worry along on his own?"

The constable reflected again, without any better success. His orderly, unimaginative mind could find no place for Victor

in the scheme of things entire. For Victor as he was, that is to say, Victor as he used to be was a different matter. An officer and a gentleman had his very definite place, a place whence he dispensed orders and, on occasions, tips.

"It 's a bit difficult to say," he admitted, after a longer pause. "I suppose he looks out for a job."

"Of course he looks out for a job," Victor groaned with the bitterness of one who had looked and looked in vain, "but how the deuce does he get it? From my experience of the last few weeks, I should say that all trades are closed to the man whose education has cost his father more than five hundred a year. For the last three months I 've been trying to earn my livelihood honestly and in the sweat of my brow—net result, a few odd jobs at the docks and a shilling for sweeping up the leaves of an old gentleman's back garden.

My present profession is cab-chasing."

"That ain't much of a trade, sir," was Fellowes' comment. "You 're right," Bretherton agreed, "it 's not. Occasionally, at the end of a two-mile trot, I receive sixpence, in return for the privilege of carrying several trunks up four flights of stairs; but more often my services are declined—without thanks."

Again Fellowes meditated, and then spoke his mind.

"I should give it up, sir, if I was you."

Bretherton shrugged his shoulders irritably. Fellowes was like everyone else; his well-meant and ponderously delivered advice was, after all, but an echo of Diana's taunt that, apart from his money, the world would have no use for him at all.

"I 'll be hanged if I do," he said shortly.

"Just pride, sir?" the constable suggested.

Victor took the pipe from between his lips and looked up at him defiantly.

"That 's it, I suppose—just pride. Hang it all, it makes a man feel small when he realizes that he has n't got any market value at all."

Fellowes, who had had dealings with the unwanted, agreed that it did. Victor stared out into the haze above the river and spoke out of the bitterness of his heart.

"I don't mind owning that, if I 'd known what I was letting myself in for three months ago, I should have thought twice—a good many times—before I joined the ranks of the unwashed and unemployed. But, now I 've started, I 've got to worry through—somehow."

He paused for a reply; but Fellowes' only comment was a doubtful cough. Bretherton thrust the comfortable pipe into his mouth again and produced the ghost of a laugh.

"Meanwhile, the devil only knows where my next meal comes in! I suppose you could n't suggest any means of acquiring it—honest if possible?"

Fellowes obligingly racked his brains —with entirely unsatisfactory results. So far as he could see, the only way in which he could assist Captain the Honourable Victor Bretherton to a much-needed breakfast would be by the offer of a small loan; and he was not quite sure whether a former officer in the Welsh Guards would not consider it beneath his dignity to borrow a shilling from a former private in the same distinguished regiment. He hesitated and coughed, still more doubtfully, while his hand began to fumble under his capacious coat.

"I 'm afraid I can 't think of anything at this moment, sir. But— I 'm sure you won't think I 'm taking a liberty, sir— if the loan of a bob—I 'd be proud—"

"No," Bretherton said sharply, the temptation to accept it was so strong. "No, Fellowes, I won't. You 're a good chap—and thank you—but I won't."

"You 'd better, sir," the policeman urged. "A drop of something hot 'ud do you good and there 's a coffee-stall just along there."

Bretherton cut him short irritably.

"Yes, I know there 's a coffee-stall along there. For the last half hour I 've been trying not to see it—and smell it." He broke off ashamed of his own access of bad temper and then went on more quietly: "I hope you don't think I 'm too proud to accept a loan from you, Fellowes. It is n't that at all—but I 'm playing the game on my own."

Fellowes slipped the coin regretfully back into his pocket; he saw that Bretherton was dogged and persuasion useless.

"Well, if you won't, sir, I must be mov-

ing along my beat; but if you should 'appen to change your mind by the time I 'm round this way again—"

"Don't tempt me, Fellowes, don't tempt me," Bretherton groaned. "By the way, I suppose I can stay on this seat for a bit longer?"

"That 's all right, sir," the policeman nodded; but he did not extend the permission to the other occupant of the seat, and his hand went out to the hunched bundle which, as he touched it, ceased to snore. Something in the wretched humility of the object's attitude caused Victor to protest.

"Can 't you leave the old scarecrow, too? There 's plenty of room for us both, now you 've turned off the other poor devil."

Fellowes' gloved hand drew back from the scarecrow's shoulder; he rolled on majestically towards Westminster Bridge

and vanished into the night. As the haze swallowed him, the scarecrow opened an eye and surveyed his retreating form with stealthy satisfaction. She had scored one in the game of moving on—that drearily exciting contest between herself and the police.

"The copper 's gone on and never turned us off," she wheezed, in cheerful astonishment. "That 's a blessin'. I did n't want to be moved on from 'ere. I chose this seat particular, so as to be near the coffee-stall. I 'm 'avin' my brekfus there later on."

"You 're lucky," Victor retorted ruefully, "wish I was." Even this withered creature of the night was not so utterly destitute and unacceptable as he. Somewhere or another, by some means or another, she had managed to wrench or wheedle from an unsympathetic world the

wherewithal to buy a meal—which was more than he had done.

The creature surveyed him disapprovingly, and spoke with decision.

"It 's no use you 'intin'! I 'm not goin' to stand yer treat, if that 's what yer mean."

"I assure you," he stammered, completely taken aback. "I was n't thinking of such a thing—I had n't the least idea."

His assurances mollified her; but it did not escape him that, with instinctive suspicion, she had removed a battered and unpleasant-looking parcel, containing heaven knew what of food or rags, farther away from him along the seat. Perhaps the thing that struck him most and irritated him most in the new world where he had lived during the last three months, was the atmosphere of ceaseless suspicion and alert expectance of dishonesty.

Where he walked about expecting frankness and plain dealing, the men and women of the underworld peered out with frightened eyes for guile, and saw no insult in their openly expressed distrust. He had realized something of the inevitability of their state of mind, and felt himself foolish to resent it; nevertheless he did resent it and, perhaps, in this instance, his resentment was reflected in his face, for the ragged bundle who shared the seat with him pursued the conversation.

"Not that I would n't be willin' to stand yer a cup of cawfee," she explained, "if I 'ad the money; but I 've only got enough to pay for myself."

Victor muttered a word of thanks for her kind intentions and wished she would go to sleep while she had the opportunity, but she continued to survey him with thoughtful interest.

"What 's brought a nice-spoken young man like you down to this?" she demanded suddenly.

"Can 't get work," he replied, laconically and with irritation.

She meditated for a minute or two, shaking her head, and gazing out over the river with her bleared eyes.

"Tike my advice, dearie," she said softly at last, "and leave it alone."

Bretherton started. In the silence his thoughts had wandered off into another direction, and it was with an effort that he recalled his last remark.

"What—work?" he asked in surprise.

The scarecrow's bonnet gave a negative quiver.

"Not the work, dearie," she said, "the drink."

Bretherton laughed grimly and, with perfect truth, assured her that he had not touched a drop for weeks. The scare-

crow smiled back at him, a smile in which cunning comprehension was mingled with a growing drowsiness.

"That 's because you 'ave n't 'ad the money; if you 'd bin flush it 'ud ha' bin a different story. I knows yer. Tike my advice, dearie—an old woman's advice—and, when the luck turns, leave it alone."

She yawned and tucked her dirty hands closer to her sides beneath her shawl.

"And now you an' me 'ull 'ave our forty till the copper come rahnd again. Pleasant dreams, dearie." The last words were punctuated with an incipient snore, as her head slipped down and she collapsed into an inhuman lump of rags and wretchedness. By her side Bretherton stared out into the night and thought of the three months that had passed and the three months that were yet to come.

So far he had proved—what? That Diana was right? Undoubtedly. Cast

on his own resources—as she had been—into the world of London, he had failed, and failed utterly, to make for himself a place. It was the black and bitter truth that, until three months ago, he had existed solely by virtue of the position his fathers had made for him and the money he had not earned. More, the last three months had proved to him, in humiliating fashion, that he was quite incapable of existing in any other way. The net result of his acceptance of Diana's taunting challenge had been the discovery that he was a failure. There was no other word for it—a failure!

Yet the knowledge did not sting and humiliate him as the mere suspicion of his own incompetency had done three months ago. In the interval he had learned much—above all, how to make excuses for those who go under. The interval between the respectability of the black coat

and the rags of the Embankment was—he knew it now—so narrow and so easily overstepped; in the doss-house and the docks he had drifted against men whose voice and speech had told him that they were what he was—for life. And he had learned the meaning of the words that Diana had flung at him in her wrath, "If a man will not work neither shall he eat." He was not a man given to, or even capable of, analyzing his feelings; but he realized dimly that he was the better for the knowledge he had gathered in the underworld. It was something to know that the underworld existed—even though he himself could find no hope, could formulate no theory of aid, for those who moved amid its darkness.

But Diana—would that view of the case content Diana? He always came back to that point in the end. He had admitted many things to himself during the last

three months; and one of them was that, consciously or unconsciously, the motive for his plunge into the underworld had been the desire to justify his existence in the eyes of Diana Massingberd. He knew now that his purpose was to seek her out at the end of his probation, to find her by some means or other—by advertisement, by inquiry—and tell her what he had done for love of her. Imperceptibly, during the last three months, the barrier that had once stood, fast and firm, between himself and a shop-girl, had crumbled into nothingness; with his new knowledge of things as they are, instead of things as they seem, he wondered how he could ever have believed in its existence. For he had come to judge men and women by what they were instead of by what they possessed.

But Diana—that was her standard too, and she would judge him as a failure.

She had told him that he would prove one; all he could say to her was that her words were true to the letter. Would it be enough for her that he had tried—and failed? He groaned; and the old woman beside him stirred.

"What 's matter, dearie?" she inquired sleepily.

"I was only thinking what a silly fool I am," he told her.

She grunted and wriggled closer against the seat.

"We 're all of us that, dearie—or we should n't be here."

Her voice trailed off into a snore and he sat, uncomforted, with his hand upon his head. With thoughts of Diana began to mingle longings for his problematic breakfast and an aching vision of the Carlton last time he had dined there. He sucked fiercely at his pipe; it had gone out, but there was still a little tobacco left

in it. He felt for his matches and, half turning his head, saw that he and the scarecrow were no longer alone upon the bench. Another silent creature of the night—a woman—had crept up out of the darkness and taken the vacant place beyond the snoring bundle. She sat with bent head and hands tucked for warmth into the pockets of her shabby jacket; the light from his match showed him that, and something in the attitude was suddenly familiar. He leaned forward, holding the match in the still air, till its flame shone upon a down-turned face surmounted by a shapeless hat.

It was Diana Massingberd

CHAPTER XV

DIANA'S head rose with a jerk as she heard her name. The burned-out match had fallen from Bretherton's fingers, and she saw only the outline of a shabby figure leaning forward on a seat and divided from her by the scarecrow.

"Who are you?" she asked in sullen surprise.

"My name 's Bretherton."

She repeated it stupidly—and then started and peered through the darkness.

"Not—Captain Bretherton?"

"The same," he said with a little, awkward laugh.

She looked at him in grave incredulity and drew her hand across her forehead. Even in the uncertain light he could see

that her fingers were coming through her gloves.

"What are you doing here?" she asked abruptly.

He parried the question with "What are you?" She leaned back defiantly and dug her hands deep into her pockets.

"If you want to know," she said, "I 'm here because I have nowhere else to go. I 'm resting on this seat till a policeman moves me on."

He bit back a curse. What he could bear for himself, he could not bear for her. And yet, the next moment, he was glad (with a thrill of shame at his own gladness) that she was a failure, too. For surely, that was the meaning of her presence here; the Embankment at three of a November morning was sacred to the failure and the constable.

He looked out at the river and imitated her own matter-of-fact tone.

"That 's exactly my case—only I 've got an advantage over you. The policeman on this beat happens to be an old friend of mine and he says I may stay here as long as I like."

He was waiting for a touch of emotion in her, of softening towards himself. None came.

"If you 've so much influence with the powers that be," she jeered, "perhaps you 'll intercede with them for me?"

"With pleasure," Bretherton said politely—wondering how much longer this farce was to be kept up. He was rather relieved when she turned on him impatiently.

"What are you masquerading like this for? Are you trying to eke out your totally inadequate income by sensational journalism?"

"By sensational journalism?" he repeated, taken aback.

"I thought perhaps you were writing up the horrors of midnight London for a halfpenny paper," she explained recklessly. "If you are, I dare say I could be of some assistance to you—give you some good tips—"

He understood why she spoke like that. He, too, had felt as she did now—his hand against every man's and every man's hand against him.

"You know I 'm not clever enough for that," he said.

Again she looked at him sharply across the scarecrow.

"Then what are you doing?" she demanded.

"Looking for work," he answered doggedly.

She said nothing for a moment, but in the darkness he heard her shift a little on her seat and knew that she was surveying him even more closely—his un-

shorn face, his tattered coat, his boots. He waited for her to speak.

"You don't mean to tell me that this is genuine—that you are penniless—like me?"

"Are you penniless?" he asked, with a catch at his throat.

She shrugged her shoulders and leaned back again.

"Quite," she said briefly.

Again something caught at his throat and the desire to curse—something or someone—was hot in his heart; but he only said huskily, "Tell me about it."

"What 's the use?" she objected defiantly.

"Tell me," he urged again. She looked fixedly away from him with eyes that had begun to smart.

"I 've had hard times since—since I saw you?"

"No work?" he suggested gently. He

knew what that meant, now—he knew.

"Very little. I got a job soon after I came back to London. Only kept it a fortnight, though." She spoke in jerks, the back of her head towards him.

"How was that?" he asked as she paused.

"Knocked up—got a chill—was ill for weeks. Had to leave and go into lodgings. That took the rest of my money. Since then—"

She broke off, perforce, swallowing lumps in her throat and fighting with her own self-pity. Before Victor Bretherton, of all men on earth, she must keep a stiff upper lip, remembering what their last interview had been. She gave a final determined gulp and got out something that bore a faint and mirthless likeness to a laugh.

"Oh, of course I have no right to grumble—no right at all. If I had n't

behaved like a lunatic—if I'd taken proper care of my little fortune—my three hundred pounds—I should n't have been turned out of my lodgings because I could n't pay the bill, should I? So I 've only myself to blame. I suppose that ought to be a comforting reflection, but I don't know that it is—particularly. Still, after all, I don't regret having played the fool—no, I don't, I don't. It was worth it—worth every penny of the money. I had my good time—my glorious month—when I did what I liked and said what I liked and humbugged the lot of you—"

She stopped again, bit her lip and reddened.

"No," she corrected herself, "I did n't mean that. I ought n't to have said that to you—now. Please forgive me."

"Of course I forgive you," he assured her. The shapeless black hat shaded her eyes from him, but he knew instinctively

that they were looking at him more gently —and when she spoke again the flippant hardness had gone from her voice.

"Now, it 's your turn to tell me things," she said. "How long is it since you lost your money?"

She took it for granted that he had lost his money. He hesitated as to whether he should undeceive her immediately and decided to lead up to the announcement with caution. It was his turn now to look away from her, twisting the empty pipe between his fingers.

"I 've been at this sort of game for the last three months."

"Three months?" She made a rapid calculation. "Why, it 's not much more than that since I was at Pontresina!"

"Not very much more," he assented.

Suddenly and to his intense surprise, she broke into a nervous giggle. The tears ran down her cheeks and she leaned

back and wiped them away helplessly, trying in vain to get out an intelligible word.

"What 's the joke?" he asked, bewildered and a little hurt.

She shook her head weakly, tried to explain, and slid off into another fit of silly laughter.

"I—can 't help it," she wailed at last. "It just struck me—if only the people—the people who knew us at the Engadine—could see us now!" She nodded towards his rags and shook convulsively.

"They'd notice a difference," Victor agreed grimly.

"They would. Do you—" she gurgled and almost choked with laughter—"do you remember—my pink dress? We were both of us rather—rather smart in those days, were n't we? Just—just look at my gloves!"

She held up a hand with every finger protruding. Bretherton's cold red hands

had been guiltless of gloves for many a week, but he extended a mud-caked foot.

"They 're not worse than my boots."

She looked down at the boots and her shoulders no longer shook; he ceased to be humorous in her eyes and became simply pathetic. After all, how infinitely worse it must be for him than it was for her—for the big, spoiled boy who had lounged his selfish way through life and had never known the meaning of work, of hardship, of all there is comprised in the cold word necessity! She felt a lump in her throat again; and would have given anything in the wide world to be able to help him, to be able to see him as he used to be, neat, immaculate, expensive.

"You poor fellow," she said. "You poor fellow, you must find it terribly hard."

He nodded an assent while she looked at him thoughtfully. It was clear to her that something more than just financial

ruin must have befallen him; even without a penny he could actually call his own, Lord Raynesworth's brother and Mrs. Cantelupe's nephew ought to be safe from the poverty that means want. There must have been some quarrel with his family, some very bitter cause of offence, since they could let him fall to this.

"Won't your people do anything for you?" she asked. "They ought to. Surely your brother—"

"I have n't asked him," Bretherton interrupted her.

"Have you quarreled with him, then?"

"No." He hesitated and turned his face away again. "No, I have n't quarreled with him. The fact is, he does n't know; none of them know—"

He halted and Diana stared at him in blank astonishment. Here was something approaching insanity.

"They don't know that you have lost

your money?" she repeated incredulously. He nodded in silence.

"But they must know," she insisted. "You must tell them. It is perfectly ridiculous of you not to have told them before. They 'll be only too glad to help you when they know—at any rate, they 'll give you a start."

"I don't want them to give me a start," he retorted curtly.

"You don't want them to give you a start? But—"

"Miss Massingberd," he broke in doggedly, "I 'm trying to do what you said I could n't—fight the world on my own."

There was a silence ruffled only by a tremendous snore from the scarecrow. In Diana's eyes were amazement, pity, self-reproach and something else besides. It was because of the taunts that she had flung at him that he was here, homeless and hungry and with his feet coming

through his boots. Because of what she had said, he, so utterly incapable of life in earnest, had come out into the real world to prove himself a man—and had failed, even as she had done. But he had cared enough to try.

"You don't mean," she said, striving to keep her voice steady, "you surely don't mean that—because of all the ridiculous things I said—when I was angry—"

His head gave an emphatic assent.

"I do; but they were not ridiculous. My own experience has proved that they were perfectly correct—except in one particular. You said that I should throw up the sponge in a week. I have n't done that."

Again, in the silence between them, the scarecrow snored. Bretherton, waiting for Diana to speak, glanced covertly towards her face; but, being bent downwards, it was darkened under the shadow

of the shapeless hat. When she spoke at last her voice was level and controlled, but low.

"Then it is through me that you have come down to this?"

"Yes," he muttered.

"I am—very sorry."

"Sorry?" he repeated with a lift of his shoulders. "You ought to be glad."

"Glad?" She turned on him, her eyes bright and almost fierce. "Glad to see you like this—like this—when you might have applied to your friends, might have—You must apply to them at once—at once, do you hear?"

The time had come to make a clean breast of the whole business; he cleared his throat and shifted his feet awkwardly.

"Do you hear?" she repeated impatiently.

"Miss Massingberd," he said slowly, "I

think it is only fair to tell you that you have made a mistake."

"A mistake? What mistake?"

"A very natural one, of course," he went on steadily; but with his heart thumping hard beneath his tattered coat. "Finding me apparently homeless on the Embankment, you have jumped to the conclusion that I am a ruined man. But I 'm not; though I have n't a penny in my pocket, I 've still got six hundred a year when I choose to make use of it."

She said nothing articulate; but he heard her check an exclamation and saw her draw herself stiffly back to the farther end of the seat.

"And six hundred a year," he finished, "seems a great deal more to me now than it did three months ago."

He waited, wondering if she had understood all that he meant to imply. Appar-

ently not; for her next question was sharp and almost scornful.

"But if you have still got six hundred a year when you choose to make use of it, what on earth are you doing on the Thames Embankment at three o'clock in the morning—and in those boots?"

"You remember," he asked her, "what you said to me that day at Pontresina?"

"I remember," she answered constrainedly, "some of the things I said."

"You told me," he went on, "that I was n't man enough to find myself a place in the world without money to bolster me up. You told me that I was a poor, backboneless creature—and that I should go to the wall if I were turned out to earn my bread for six months. I did n't believe a word of it then; but I 've found out since that you were right, though I set out to prove you wrong."

She clasped her shabby gloves tightly together and blinked hard at the lights on Westminster Bridge. It was not only the fog that blurred them so to her.

"Then do you mean," she asked under her breath, "do you really mean—?"

"I do," he nodded, taking courage. "Are you so very much surprised to find that I've got a little pride? Even the 'ornamental classes' have a certain amount of that, you know; it isn't only labor that stands on its dignity. I've been existing on the work of my own hands and brains for the last three months—and for twelve weeks now I haven't touched a penny that I haven't earned."

"You," she said, "you!" She thought of him as he was at Pontresina—of his loafing ways, of his fussy importance over his food, of his open and unashamed devotion to the cult of his own comfort.

Yet she remembered that she had always believed that somewhere in him there was the making of a man.

"Yes, you were quite right," he went on with a dreary little laugh. "I 'm a useless devil. Nobody wants my services—I 'm not a bit of good to anyone. You were entirely justified in looking down on me—"

"No, no," she broke in, angry, but not with him. "I won't let you say that—I had no right—"

"But you had," he persisted, "you had. All that you said to me was perfectly true. The world only tolerated me because I could pay my way—more or less—with money I never earned and was n't capable of earning. For every useful purpose, I 'm a failure."

He flung himself back in his seat as he spoke and the scarecrow started and wriggled drowsily. The lights of West-

minster Bridge were still blurred and hazy to Diana's eyes.

"Well, I 've no right to look down on you for that," she said. "If you were a failure, what else am I? If you can 't find work, neither can I. If nobody wants you, nobody wants me either."

"I do," he said quickly.

The blood rushed to her face; she opened her lips to speak but, before the hesitating words came through them, there was a jerk and a cough beside her—and from the shapeless bundle on the seat a tousled head and battered bonnet had reared themselves to the level of her shoulder. The scarecrow had awakened to the troubles of this work-a-day world. Bretherton cursed her silently and wondered how much she had heard; but her expression was one of owlish gravity as she raised her head and sniffed the morning air.

"I think it 's abaht time I 'ad me brekfus," she explained. "The cawfee-stall smells invitin', don't it, miss? And you two 'ull be able to chat more comfortable-like withaht me sittin' in the middle of yer." She gathered up her unpleasant looking parcel, tucked her shawl about her and nodded to Bretherton. "You move along, dearie, and tike my plaice."

And, trailing behind her the fragments of her torn skirt, she moved slowly away, sniffing expectantly as she went.

Diana sat silent, with her hands clasped before her, and Bretherton could read nothing from her face.

"Diana," he said, "I remember telling you once that my income was a miserable pittance, hardly enough for me to live upon. I 've found out my mistake since then. It 's not only enough for one to live upon; it 's enough for two."

She made no movement towards him

but thrust her hands down hard into her pockets and would not look at him.

"Diana," he whispered.

"Do you realize what you're saying?" she asked harshly.

"Yes," he said, "I realize that I'm offering you proprietary rights in a poor, backboneless creature who never did a useful thing in his life."

"Don't," she muttered—almost sullenly. He waited for her to speak again, but nothing came.

"You refuse to—to entertain the idea? I'm—sorry."

Was she refusing him? She hardly knew. Everything—dire need as well as affection—was drawing her to him. It was because she could hardly, even to herself, separate and distinguish the one from the other, that she hesitated. Had she not—being hungry—called herself a fool for refusing Sir Jabez Grinlay?

How was she to judge and be fair to him when he came to her offering so much besides his love? She faced round on him suddenly and bitterly.

"Captain Bretherton, I 'm homeless and penniless. I have n't tasted food for more than twelve hours. I 've been half starved for days. And now, if I understand you aright, you offer to make me your wife."

"You do understand me aright," he told her.

"That is to say," Diana went on, pitiless to herself, "you offer me a home—and what is to me a fortune."

"And myself," he suggested.

"And yourself—oh, please don't imagine I have forgotten that important item. But, under the circumstances, don't you think that you 're putting too great a strain upon my disinterestedness?"

He saw how she was fighting with herself and spoke very gently.

"I understand what you mean. Perhaps I ought not to have spoken to-night. Perhaps I ought to have waited until things were better with you. It might have been fairer to you—to us both, if you like to put it that way. But—I am going to tell you what is in my mind, even if you are angry with me for saying it."

"Go on," she told him briefly.

"Perhaps, in my blundering conceit, I made a mistake; but it seemed to me, that last day at Pontresina, that if I had said to you 'I care for you for your own sake; I want you, not your money, but for yourself—' it seemed to me that you would have come to me then. If you knew how often I have regretted that I did not say it! Tell me, was I wrong?"

"No," she nodded, "you were n't wrong. Then I would have—"

"And now?"

"No," she said harshly, turning her back on him; but he only drew a little nearer to her, quietly persistent.

"Because you are too proud—is that it?"

"I suppose that is it," she admitted—and then, more stubbornly, "yes, I am too proud."

"Are you trying to make me still more ashamed of myself?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she asked back.

"I mean that I was willing enough to marry you when you were the plutocrat and I was the pauper. Have n't I put my pride in my pocket for you, Diana? Have n't I trailed about London for the last three months trying to justify my existence in your eyes?"

His hand went out and lay upon her arm and she did not shake it off.

"Diana, a much humiliated failure asks

you to lead him in the way he should go."

He heard something between a laugh and a sob and her hand came out of her pocket and lay in his.

"It will be the blind leading the blind, then—and the end of that is the ditch."

"Never mind," he encouraged her, "never mind—even the ditch can't be worse than the Embankment in November."

He had followed the scarecrow's advice —moved along and taken her place. But Diana pushed him back.

"There's some one coming—a policeman," she cautioned—and Fellowes loomed large into sight. He had been much exercised in his mind over his former captain's plight; he was taken aback now by the change in his former captain's manner. Bretherton scented breakfast and leaped to his feet.

"That you, Fellowes? Glad you've

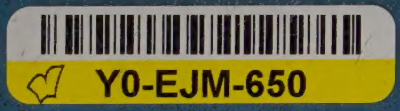
come back. Look here, I 've changed my mind about that shilling—if you could oblige me with the loan of it for a few hours? Thanks, awfully. And you 'll be glad to hear I 've changed my mind on the other point, too. I 'm going back to civilization—this morning. Meanwhile, this lady and I are going to breakfast off the coffee-stall at your expense."

And he was off to the coffee-stall, the precious shilling glistening in his palm; leaving Fellowes, dumb with bewilderment, to scrutinize the shabby figure on the seat and thoughtfully resume his ponderous walk.

When he had gone a few steps he turned and looked back. There were two shabby figures now on the seat beneath the lamp; and he heard the clash of crockery and voices, muffled, as of those who spoke with their mouths full. Also he heard Bretherton laugh and Diana laugh back.

And so, in the wind of the morning, they began life together. The world had need of neither of them; but they had need of each other.

THE END


Y0-EJM-650